Health Orientation, Research Centeredness and Realism in Avicenna's Canon of Medicine

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Abstract

Background: Avicenna is a genius and unique person that his introduction needs a thick book. This study was conducted to more familiarity with Avicenna’s methods and findings to improve human health.

Methods: This was a library study. In order to improve exactness of findings, we computerized the Arabic, English and Persian versions of Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine and have made a fast and accurate data bank and uploaded on the internet site of Ministry of Health and Medical Education of Iran, Deputy of Research as available from: http://www.elib.hbi.ir/persian/LIBRARY.htm and also theorizing Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine as three roots (Root model) for current medicine, decayed, disabled and active roots and finally, after searching, gathering and encoding the findings, analyzed them as a qualitative research and thematic content.

Results: Health orientation, research centeredness and freeing from nihilism and also achieving to dynamic points and taking appropriate action in relation to treatment of some diseases such as rabies, leprosy, tuberculosis and similar cases at this valuable book can be regarded as a hypothesis to be approved or rejected using the new technology. So appropriate methods require testing many Avicenna hypotheses and if approved, utilize them as supportive methods and complementary of common treatment methods either or even as modern solutions.

Conclusion: It is necessary that our students within course of Iranian and Islamic culture and civilization to be more familiar with activities of scientists like Avicenna to substitute the empty place of him.

Keywords: Traditional medicine; Avicenna’ Canon of medicine; History of medicine; Health orientation; Research centeredness; Realism; Theorizing

Introduction

In the end of 10th and the beginning of 11th century AD (the 4th century A.H.) the vast land of ancient Iran has special status from political point of view. In that time, Iran was changed into swamp islands of political situation and insecure scattered jungle but some flowers as Avicenna with global aroma were grown¹ and the 4th century A.H. from cultural point of view was regarded as most considerable historical age in Islamic countries since in this period many thinkers, philosophers, jurisprudents, poets and authors were present that by their attempts science and literature of these countries and the other countries were safe from incidents and result in growth and innovation of sciences; so in the second millennium by wisdom and insisting on ability within knowledge he started working by insisting on nobility and priority of prevention to treatment and started slogan of medical social basis at the second A.D. millennium goal of medicine is keeping the health and returning it while disease and by mixing science and faith have² and within gaining privilege from science and faith can achieve to divine ranks and eternal global fame.

In spite that medical history of each country has close relationship with other countries and Iranian medicine cannot be separated from Greek and Arabic
According to a series of completing thought and by virtue of philosophy of history, always the pioneers have attempted to transfer their thoughts and experiences to the next generation and other people have attempted to add some issues and experiences to them, but doubtlessly all of the tribes, although age of completing medical sciences and health, did not have the same share and sometimes an important historical incident would bring sudden change at inner talents of nations and within framework of this growth until some time they could advance in the field of global health and medicine, worldwide. This important historical event in ancient Iran is the Emergence of Islam and accepting Islam religion by Iranian people and within this thinking and belief and innate talent innovation the Iranian people could advance for several centuries.

It is obvious that medical art and science is as a result of global experiences that it is impossible to specify limit and border for it and is not limited within geographical, belief, political and tribe borders. Avicenna, Galen, Pasteur and Sydenham more than being Iranian, Greek, French and English are regarded as great persons in the field of medicine and belonged to all people of the world and especially they belong to nations that follow their goals. Since when some people attempt to find special solution a kind of powerful spiritual relationship beyond domain of nation and political and geographical borders will be created. Medicine is regarded as powerful and glorious tree that its great branches have developed to different regions of the world and considering separate approach without regarding main body and other branches do not seem logical.

The aim of writing this article is to become more familiar with working method of Avicenna and discovering the secret of his success and extracting his effective methods with the goal of benefiting from his educational and research success and using this solution with the goal of keeping and improving health of human and to be found the ideas in his work, which provide suggestions for useful research in the future.

**Materials and Methods**

This is a library study. But in order to improve exactness of findings, we computerized the Arabic, English and Persian versions of Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine and have made a fast and accurate Data bank and uploaded on the Internet site of Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Deputy of Research of Iran, as available from: http://www.elib.hbi.ir/persian/LIBRARY.htm. And also theorizing about Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine as three roots (Root model) for current medicine (Decayed roots, Disabled roots and Active roots). And finally, after searching, gathering and encoding the findings, analyzed them as a qualitative research and thematic content.

**Results**

**Present Status of Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine**

For facilitation of statement of problem, the science and art of medicine is like a bulky tree that is planted since creation of human and rising pains and diseases, in which this tree has been irrigated by many Ancient Iranian, Indian, Chinese and Ancient Greek scientists and now by describing roots of this genealogy we can deal with role of Avicenna’s Canon; so that by studying aforesaid book we face with 3 types of roots (Figure 1) including: Dry or Decayed Roots, Out of Work or Disable Roots and Active Roots.

![Fig. 1: The Relationship between Traditional and Current Medicine (Root or tree model)](image)

By saying dry roots, we mean those classes of medical beliefs that were present before Avicenna but...
in the beginning of the second millennium they were rejected by this honorable scientist, so that he rejected drinking blood of rabid dog by a patient that was bitten by the dog and also he did not certified anti-magic effects of Osaj (Lycium arabicum=ﻋﻮﺳﺞ), But is presented in Canon of Medicine.

By saying out of work roots, we mean past successful believes and experiences that nowadays within scientific advances and by benefiting from modern technology have been replaced by new methods and believe. Like complicated prescriptions of Avicenna for treatment of leprosy, tuberculosis and many other diseases in that time and therefore such roots have played their role and create suitable situation for growth of other roots in next ages. Nowadays not only they are kept as a historical document but also can be used as suitable research issues for researchers in the field of pharmacology and thesis of graduates in this field, so that maybe by discovering their formulation they will be able to supply more effective and healthier drugs to medical world.

By saying active roots, we mean present live and dynamic issues that can be referred to in the text of Canon of Medicine that some of them in spite of passing more than one thousand years, can still honorably be used at medical and health associations, medical books and also can be taught at medical classes. Some of the main topics include health thought of Avicenna in relation to definition of health, environmental health, mother and child health, elderly health, travelers health, importance of sport, instructive points in relation to some infectious diseases that can be referred to in medical books and articles. For example: Definition of health and medicine “The purpose of Medicine is to preserve health if it is already attained and to restore it when it is lost”. Another example: Avicenna stresses on causation in medicine “It is necessary that the causes of health and disease are determined”. “It is also necessary to determine those conditions, which manifest themselves in health and disease”.6

Health Orientation in Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine

As it was mentioned above, Avicenna regards that the goal of medicine is keeping health and returning it while having disease and also it is referred to importance of sport health, environmental health, family health, housing health, effect of different factors on human health and has announced his society basis and health orientation message in which it is dealt with this issue in Public Health and Series at Ancestors’ Medicine Book.5

Research Centeredness in Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine

Traditional medicine resources and especially Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine not only are social based and health oriented but also they are research centered and always the tests were performed based on analogy and pioneers of this field including Avicenna himself was researcher and insisted on testing each drug before prescribing it. It is possible that by using new approach and by benefiting modern research tools to evaluate traditional medicine resources, case studies and reports in Avicenna’s Canon as hypothesis and valuable research designs and by using modern laboratory equipments, epidemiology software and vital statistics to test the ideas that Avicenna due to lack of required equipment and technology never succeeded to test them and discover inner secrets and preventive and treatment characteristics of many materials that are available in nature.7

Logical Approach to Causes of Health and Disease and Avoidance of Superstition Thoughts in Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine

Mixing the medicine with superstition and magic was present in all tribes and old medicine before Islam. So that according to History of Medicine, Egyptians used magic in medicine and this issue was present Iranian medicine before Islam and some researchers believe that it has root in superstitious believes of Egyptians and many other countries.8 It is interesting to say that in none of the original medical references of traditional medicine there is no place for superstition. So that be benefiting from ability of prompt search in electronic versions of Alhavi (by: Rhazes),9 Kamel-al-sanaeh (by: Ahvazi),10 Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine11 and Zakhireye Khwarazmshahi (by: Jorjani)12 we can conclude that not only there is no chapter and page dealing with superstition but also by searching word by word there is no instances of superstition and only in the second volume of Canon of Medicine, only one time the term magic word is mentioned which refers to drug called Maybush (Osaj) and some people believe that is this drug will be hanged from door and window it can nullify magic, but Avicenna had not approved this belief.13

It shall be mentioned that unfortunately during Safavids period we were faced with mass of superstition and illogical thoughts to medicine and entrance of many magic, glamour and astrology and such unreal
thoughts into field of health and medicine in which they are revealed in different pages of book called “Status of Medicine during Safavids Period”.

But meanwhile fortunately in none of the four essential textbooks of traditional medicine including Alhavi, Kamel-al-sanaeh, Canon and Zakhireye was falsified, except cases that were gradually completed and by advancing in the field of knowledge and technology have been replaced with modern medical methods.

Avicenna in the entrance of the Canon of Medicine has mentioned that the goal of medicine is first of all, keeping health i.e. primary prevention and finally returning health to patients (secondary and tertiary prevention). In the first pages of this book, it is mentioned that rabies is not created as a result of harmful material that is present in mouth of rabid animals (rabies virus) and is entered into human body through biting site, therefore it is recommended to wash place of wound and avoiding of suture of biting place of rabid animals, in which nowadays it is completely observed and even it announces the message that rabies can be cured before starting the sign of hydrophobia, so that persons in charge of modern medical sciences that classify rabies among incurable diseases to test this hypothesis and by benefiting from today’s advanced science and tool they attempt to discover or produce curative drugs. He also believes that tuberculosis is among curable contagious diseases and all of the versions of this book have recommended this issue, but we are facing with sinister phenomena of multi-drug-resistant-tuberculosis (MDR-TB) in this time, but still we are not hopeless and pharmacologists are conducting research on virtue, priority of prevention over treatment and health over medicine that some of them are offered in the following section:

Avicenna Canon of Medicine as a Course at European Universities

Gustawe lebon in relation of Avicenna’s books have written that: Avicenna’s books are translated into many languages and until 6 centuries his books were regarded as reference medical books and in all of the universities of France and Italy the only academic book that was taught was Avicenna’s books and even in university of Monplieh city until several past decades was taught. It can be claimed that the medical school of Avicenna is the base and mother of the new medicine, as his Canon was the complete set of the medical views before him and the infrastructure of the medical works after him.

Avicenna and Philosophy

Discussing activities and philosophical works of Avicenna needs to write another article and thus in this relation we only refer to this important point that among philosophers, Avicenna is regarded as the greatest Islamic philosopher that has stable and considerable philosophical system. The important characteristic of Avicenna that has created unique and excellent character from himself in Islamic world and also
medieval time at west of the world is that he was able to offer special definition with proof for some fundamental concepts in the field of philosophy. The character of Avicenna during his life and fame of his books after his death was basics for all scholars and specialists of those books were found at ancient Iran, which caused to transfer the center of philosophy and medicine from Baghdad to Iran. In addition, Avicenna’s medicine, and all ancient medicine, is intimately bound up with philosophy.

Necessity of Introducing Real Appearance of Avicenna

Avicenna as a studios, serious, hopeful, hard working, perseverance and humble person to save medical and health books like swamp flower grew in the atmosphere full of politics and created a masterpiece. An studios person that when read a book called “Beyond Nature by Aristotle” for 40 times and did not understand it, still he was not hopeless and had tried to find solution for understanding it. Avicenna Canon of Medicine is valuable heritage of medicine all though world until that time that was written and has entered such energy in framework of medical and health tree of the world, in which it is possible to observe instances of dynamic health orientation in branches, leaves and flowers of this bulky tree.

In spite of endless attempts of enemies for assasinating character of this great scientist which resulted in slowing his scientific movement but they never succeeded to completely eliminate him and our duty is removing any doubts and ambiguity and canceling fictitious character and bad teachings from Avicenna and introducing his real, honorable and constructive appearance as monotheism, studios, imitable, health oriented, research centeredness and logical person. The basic and essential impact of the Avicenna medicine has emerged in different dimensions: Health Orientation, Research Centeredness and Realism. Avicenna is genius and rare person in which knowing him needs a whole life and introducing him needs a very thick book. Current medicine is as a result of trials and errors and experiences of Islamic, Christians, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Greek, Indian … and Egyptian’s ancestors. And Avicenna is a scientist who belongs to all people of the world. And his relatives are whom which followers his monotheistic thoughts and dynamic way. Now due to necessity of globalization of all human relations, this global personality shall not be humiliaded by limiting him to time, place, special religion and tribe.

Discussion

- Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine is health oriented, research centeredness and realistic.
- The contents of this book and other resources of traditional medicine are as the roots of the modern medicine.
- Some of these roots are enabled, some of them are disabled (Hypothesis) and the others are decayed (erroneous).
- To find that some of the statements in the Canon are certainly erroneous (Decayed roots), and that modern investigations have placed us at an infinitely greater advantage, does not invalidate the work as a whole.
- The achievements of any age are subject to decay with the lapse of centuries, but the ideas, which gave rise to them, remain living through all cycles.
- A scientific approach to Avicenna Canon of Medicine in modern thought is not to propose a return, but a new approach to his book as an abundance of theories, which should be tested, with using of new technology and tools.
- Appropriate methods require testing many Avicenna hypotheses and if approved, utilize them as supportive methods and complementary of common treatment methods either or even as modern solutions.

It is necessary that our students within course of Iranian and Islamic culture and civilization to be more familiar with activities of scientists like Avicenna and in near future they can substitute the empty place of Avicenna.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

References

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