

Religious perspectives in dealing with AIDS

By
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Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome has become a plague. However, in many parts of the world the subject of AIDS is taboo and HIV-positive people are treated as outcasts. Therefore, the number of AIDS cases may be underreported.

Although, ethics have long been recognized as an essential requirement in the making of a physician, there are particular ethical issues in dealing with AIDS patients. However, even though AIDS has only recently been recognized, Islamic writings offered clear ethical guidance in dealing with it. The ancient physician Ishaq ibn Ali al-luuahawi wrote extensively about ethics in his book, *Adab al-Tabib* (Ethics of a Physician). It is a beautiful illustration of the fact that problems of responsibility, ethical dilemmas, and the needs of the society are nothing new to medicine. His guiding principle was, as mentioned in Quran and also the Torah, "... Whoever kills a human being not in lieu of another human being nor because of mischief on earth, it is as if he has killed all mankind; and whoever saves the life of a human being, it is as if he has saved the life of all mankind." Qur'an:5/32.

The Muslim physicians Al-Razi (841-926A.D.) and Avicenna (980-1036A.D.) defined medicine as the art concerned with the preservation of good health, combating of disease, and restoration to health. Islamic medical ethics draw their essence from Islamic teachings, which call for honesty, sound performance, and consciousness of God in every act. They are based on the principles of the sanctity of human life, body, the soul and safeguarding its privacy.

An Islamic response to AIDS is directed, firstly, to prevent the disease by having a sexual lifestyle prescribed by God. In those cases where AIDS is acquired without sexual contact, all measures should be taken to protect the individual. Muslim physicians have an obligation to continue caring for AIDS patients while taking the necessary precautions for themselves. They should also participate in preventive measures and education. Regulations governing the practice of the medical profession stipulate that a physician must practice his profession for the benefit of the individual and the community within the framework of respecting patients' right to life, safety and dignity.