

## **Medical Errors – AUB**

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At the beginning I wish to thank the organizers for this forum and I do not hide a secret if I confess my awkwardness in the presence of Professor Kenneth Brummel Smith and Dr. Thalia Arawi whom I consider a school of thought on medical ethics. They have excelled in ever issue they wrote about while the thoughts of Professor Kenneth overwhelm our methods regardless of years.

Our subject today is educational political par excellence. It is a principle issue in the educational policy of medicine when the pseudo culture of corruption is more dominant than ever and ethics are in real and present danger.

The well known Arabic Chartouni lexicon defines medical treatment as gentle and passionate and to treat one is to perform with love and consideration, hence the saying: to love is to treat.

We should not forget that by pledging ourselves to the Hippocrates oath we vowed to help the sick and protect them of harm and injustice and to respect all human beings and practice the art with wisdom and responsibility, with freedom and loyalty and with truth, honor and love.

One would ask, where are we now from the Hippocrates oath when each day we yearn for the day that passed?

In the West where man constantly sought democracy, freedom, health and social justice, man reached high standards of civilization when he established governance that looks well after his interests. That put down fear and restlessness among citizens. Then came the various social legislations as a result of combined efforts of establishments and syndicates opening doors for equal opportunities to all and smoothing out to great extent social differences while securing a minimum standard of living to citizens. That way, the

individual was relieved of the burden of worry leading to evolution in the understanding of social justice in the human sense in self consciousness, service and giving.

Without belief in human values and right of man to medical care and a dignified free life and without democracy so spread across many areas of the planet, degradation and poverty and diseases will prevail and social justice will all but disappear.

With medical sciences evolution, whether diagnosis or treatment, human health has generally improved but problems in some newly emerging medical products and equipment have rendered the issue of medical ethics more urgent than ever. What concerns us today is the subject of medical errors. Do doctors really commit mistakes? Or is it just a matter of odd complications and a mediocre and erroneous medical system? The answer could be that it is a result of various causes. But we should admit firstly that a medical doctor is bound to make mistakes. Admittance of vulnerability is a virtue and only that, that does nothing, is immune to mistakes ending up with learning also nothing. Not to admit mistakes is a major sin, leading to repeating them and even to committing more grave ones.

To admit mistakes is not such an easy matter, especially in oriental societies where expectations are high and capabilities are limited. This leads us in many instances to rely on the will of God not of humans as a way out of responsibility and accountability. The result, unfortunately, will be loss of confidence of patients in the medical body. And because patients these days are ever more inquisitive, we tend to explain to them their diseases and the proposed treatment as well as the probable side effects. Then we ask them to sign a form of consent before an operation for instance. In the event of occurrence of mistakes, the patient should have access to the truth and to the scientific information surrounding the issue.

What remains to be clarified is the responsibility when a mistake or an error occurs and who should notify whom. Should we hold the doctor or the nurse or the hospital or the patient himself responsible?

What to do to cut down on medical errors? Which body is qualified to determine that the issue is a result of complications or a medical error? I take

in this instance the initiative to say that only the Medical Order of Physicians as represented by its scientific, investigative and specialization bodies is qualified to examine medical problems ensuing from certain prescriptions.

The Order will have to distinguish between complications and errors and will be eligible to issue judgments including penalties and disbaring for specific periods. And this occurs in 25% of claims received, numbering between 130 and 150 each year. I have to note that we are continuously working at reducing claims through teamwork action in realms of education, diagnosis, prevention, transparency and improvement in preventive measures. In this respect, I must stress the importance of improving hospitalization systems and taking necessary measures to supervise and control quality and to improve status of nurses who tend to get very tired due to overworking resulting from inadequacy in their numbers. We should not also forget that the medical ethics code has been enacted to protect the patient and the doctor alike.

We have also proposed a body of bylaws to the parliament that included conditions to practice and specialize in the art through the Lebanese Medical Board for the purpose of preserving quality of the profession and individual and social health. That came thanks to efforts we undertook in collaboration with deans of Lebanese medical schools, the ministry of high education and the ministry of health and approved by parliamentary medical and education committees hoping it will be shortly approved by the administration and justice committee and by the parliament at large.

It is our duty, as doctors, to guarantee the citizen's health and dignity. Treating patients is not accomplished by words and sedatives or intimidation and blackmail but by scientific sound practice and care. In this I stress:

- Honest and true interaction among ourselves by way of mutual respect and confidence.
- Developing medical services and scientifically augmenting hospitalization institutes to reach proper levels of science and ethics as the patient is a sacred entity that needs to be treated with love, dignity and knowledge.

Citizenship is a responsibility and an obligation we practice to preserve the fatherland and the nation is, after all, a group of values. The Good Samaritan works and observes and judges in all love and consciousness and truth and righteousness and ethics. And ethics is to survive your humanity in the existence of others and stand with others on equal footings. Do to others what you want others to do to you. This is the core of existence.

Doctors have a mission to carry out in the first place. If they commit mistakes or errors they should duly acknowledge and propose compensation. Malpractice Insurance company role comes very handy here in helping relieve burdens from upon patients and doctors alike.

Preventing medical errors relies upon a modern educational and medical system that is both independent and objective that allows for accountability and responsibility. No future is to be expected without proper ethics and there shall be no progress if we do not acknowledge our mistakes.

To excel is to self purify, even at a small scale, resting my case hoping for light at the end of the tunnel.