

Islamic values in nursing care: dealing with patients with acute and chronic conditions

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Learning objectives:

At the end of this lecture students should understand:

1. What is meant by Islamic values?
2. What are the differences of needs between patients with acute and chronic conditions?
3. What are the roles of nurses when dealing with these patients?
4. How may Islamic values be applied in nursing care when dealing with these patients?

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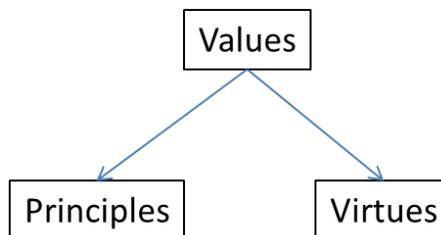
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1. Introduction

1.1 Definitions of Islamic values, virtues and principles

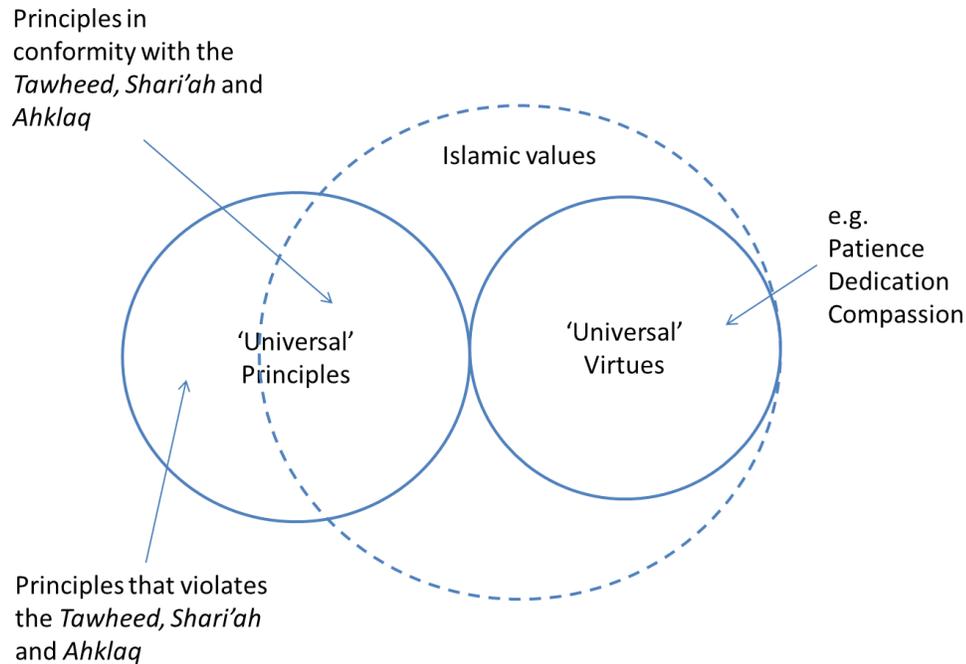
This topic touches three main subjects: the Islamic values, the nursing care; and the patient with acute and chronic conditions. In the first instance, we should understand what is meant by Islamic values. Among the many linguistic definitions of values¹; I would rather choose two to be used in this lecture. They are (1) those related to behavior (virtues) and (2) those related to concepts or principles. In the subsequent paragraphs the term 'Islamic values' encompassed not only Islamic virtues (etiquettes) but also Islamic principles. This is to ensure that students broadened their horizon, not limiting their understanding of the term Islamic values only to those related to commendable acts and virtues, while leaving out important principles in Islam.



Secondly, the term 'values' defined as principles and virtues may be Islamic or non-Islamic. While Islamic virtues or etiquettes are usually universal, what considered as universal principles may not be necessarily Islamic. Being patient, compassionate and dedicated which are part of Islamic virtues are well accepted by many, including by those with different religious backgrounds as universal values. On the other hand, what the modern world considered as universal principles such as the importance of

¹ Definitions of 'values' from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/values> accessed on 8 April 2018

alleviating pain may not be Islamic if it involves disobedient to God. In summary, the values which are in keeping with the principles of Islam can be accepted as Islamic but those which violate its principles are non-Islamic.



1.2 Nurses and nursing care in Muslim history and modern healthcare system

Nurses and nursing care originated long before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). However this is neither the place nor the time to dwell in the pre-Islamic practices of nursing care. The purpose of having this section is to demonstrate that care for the sick, although not announced as a specific line of work, is around in various cultures and civilization including the early Muslim society.

In the early Muslim society, it was reported that the female companions of the prophet (*sahabiyah*) accompanied the men in battles and took care of the wounded. Narrated by Ar-Rubayyi 'bint Mu'auwidh:

We were in the company of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) providing the wounded with water and treating them and bringing the killed to Medina (from the battle field).

Recorded by al-Bukhari in Shahih al-Bukhari²

The wife of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) also has been reported to have taken care of the Prophet when he was sick at the end of his life. Narrated by az-Zuhry:

Ubaidullah bin `Abdullah told me that `Aisha had said, "When the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) became sick and his condition became serious, he requested his wives to allow him to be treated in my house, and they allowed him. He came out leaning on two men while his feet were dragging on the ground. He was walking between Al-`Abbas and another man." 'Ubaidullah said, "When I informed Ibn `Abbas of what `Aisha had said, he asked me whether I knew who was the second man whom `Aisha had not named. I replied in the negative. He said, 'He was `Ali bin Abi Talib.'"

Recorded by al-Bukhari in Shahih al-Bukhari³

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), the Islamic values in care for the sick would have been practiced by the companions. This is because, the companions were known to refer their daily problems to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), asking for solutions as part of being obedient. Furthermore, the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), being the person given the Book, safeguarded and implemented the principles of Islam in his personal life and in the early Muslim society during his lifetime. Therefore, in essence, these were the times we should refer to and the people that we should look up to as examples when practicing Islamic values in nursing care.

The importance of nurses as a profession in the modern healthcare system can never be emphasized. Working as a team, they ensure that therapies are delivered and patients are safe. They are the staffs whom have the most contact time with the patients, especially in the ward settings.

Apart from delivering therapies, nurses are also expected to communicate with the patients, give advice on illnesses and convey health educations. Therefore it is pertinent that nurses equip themselves with communication skills necessary to complete their tasks efficiently. These skills are also important when working in a team.

The nurses, like any other healthcare professionals are expected to show empathy and compassion when dealing with patients and their relatives, at the same time maintain appropriate professional ethics and code of conduct.

² Shahih al-Bukhari, Book of Fighting for the Cause of Allah (Jihaad) (Book 56), Hadith 97 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/56/97> on 8 April 2018

³ Shahih al-Bukhari, Book of Gifts (Book 51), Hadith 22 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/51/22> on 8 April 2018

1.3 The Islamic values

The principles of Islam can be broadly categorized into three:

1. *Tawheed* – The belief of the Oneness of God
2. *Shari’ah* – The Law
3. *Akhlaq* – The ethics

When discussing inculcating Islamic values in nursing care, these three components need to be taken into consideration. As mentioned in the introduction, the term ‘value’ in the current context refers to the principles of Islam and its virtues. The principles of Islam would be discussed under the heading ‘*Tawheed*’ and ‘*Shari’ah*’, while ‘virtues’ will be discussed under the heading ‘*Akhlaq*’.

Islamic values	
Islamic Principles	Islamic Virtues
<i>Tawheed</i> <i>Shari’ah</i>	<i>Akhlaq</i>

Tawheed is the belief that there is Only One God. The concept of Oneness of God, not multiple, is mentioned in the Quran.

- (1) Say, “He is Allah, [who is] One
- (2) Allah, the Eternal Refuge
- (3) He neither begets nor is born
- (4) Nor is there to Him any equivalent

Al-Quran: Surah al-Ikhlās 114: 1-4

The One and Only God who created the worlds; gives life, nurtures and provide to all living things. Scholars term this understanding as *Tawheed ar-Rububuyyah*. We can find evidences for such belief and understanding directly from the Quran:

- (22) [He] who made for you the earth a bed [spread out] and the sky a ceiling and sent down from the sky, rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision for you. So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know [that there is nothing similar to Him].

Al-Quran: Surah al-Baqarah 2: 22

The understanding that God is the One and Only worthy of worship and submission and nothing else should be made rival with Him is termed as *Tawheed al-Uluhiyyah*. The Quran mentioned:

(5) It is You [alone] we worship and You [alone] we ask for help

Al-Quran: Surah al-Fatihah 1: 5

The concept in which God has no rivals in his names, essence and attributes is termed by scholars as *Tawheed al-Asma' wa al-Sifat*. The evidence for such understanding can be found in the same verse in Surah al-Ikhlās 114: 4 mentioned above.

Shari'ah is defined as Islamic law. God has given this law for the purpose of human protection and prosperity. Each law prescribed was to fulfil either one or more than the following objectives⁴:

1. Preservation of the religion
2. Preservation of life
3. Preservation of mind
4. Preservation of progeny
5. Preservation of wealth

All five purposes are called the *dharurat* (the necessities) and are the primary purpose of the law. The *dharurat* is followed by the *hajaat* (needs) which are additional purpose to the necessities. The third category of the purpose of the law is referred to as the *tahsinats* (the purpose which facilitates) in implementation of the law.

The *Shari'ah* covers several aspects of human lives. They are:

1. *Ibadah* (worship)
2. *Muamalat* (social contract and transactions)
3. *Jenayah* (criminal law)
4. *Munakahat* (marital law)
5. *Faraidh* (inheritance)

Akhlaq can be understood as ethics, virtues, etiquettes or good character. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself was sent to teach the people *akhlaq*. *Adaab* is another terminology used for etiquettes. In a broader sense, *adaab* also meant civilization.

⁴ Nyazee, Imran Ahsan Khan, Theories of Islamic Law, The Methodology of Ijtihad [1994, Islamic Institute of Islamic Thought (Pakistan)]: page 238

Abu Hurairah (r.a.) narrated that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said, "I was sent to perfect good character."

Reported by Bukhari in al-Adaab al-Mufrad⁵

2. The patient with acute and chronic illnesses

Patients with acute and chronic condition have different problems and needs. Patients with acute problems are commonly unstable and are usually seen in the in-patient settings. On the other hand, patients with chronic conditions are usually stable and are seen in the out-patient clinics.

Examples of acute conditions are sepsis, acute myocardial infarction, acute cerebrovascular accident (CVA) and trauma. At times these patients may have impaired conscious levels due to their acute illness. They commonly need help with their activity of daily living such as feeding, cleanliness and mobilization. Often these patients are not ready to discuss long terms plans and therapy due to pain and sometimes transient impaired cognitive capabilities.

Examples of chronic conditions include diabetes mellitus, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Patients with this condition are usually well enough to do their activity of daily livings. The management of their conditions is usually patient-centered in which they have to be actively involved in decision-making with regards to their treatment. Often, these patients require some form of health education.

In both conditions, the relatives may need to be addressed. For the acute patient, the family members need to be informed of the patient's current condition; associated acute morbidity and possible mortality. On the other hand, the family members of patient with the chronic condition should know that their support and participation in the patient's care may help in the management and subsequently achieve favorable outcome.

The differences of patients with acute and chronic illnesses are depicted in the following table.

⁵ Al-Adaab al-Mufrad, Book of Dealings with people and good character (Book 14 in English Translation) accessed from <https://sunnah.com/urn/2202730> on 8 April 2018

	Acute Illness	Chronic Illness
Examples	Sepsis, acute heart failure, acute myocardial infarction, acute cerebrovascular accident, traumatic intracranial bleed	Diabetes mellitus, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
Conscious level	Impaired in some cases	Normal most of cases
Activity of daily living (ADL)	Require help	Do not require help in most cases
Medical treatment	Fully supervised by healthcare professionals	Requires active patient's involvement
Health education	Patient's condition not suitable for health education	Requires health education

3. Inculcating Islamic values in nursing care for patients with acute and chronic conditions

Taking the points presented in previous sections into consideration, several aspects of Islamic values can be inculcated when dealing with patients in acute and chronic conditions. Before doing so, three factors need to be considered:

1. The nurse
2. The patient
3. The subject [i.e. relevant Islamic values (Islamic principles vs Islamic virtues)]

3.1 Commendable Islamic virtues among nurses

One of the ways to inculcate Islamic values in nursing practice is to teach Islamic virtues or etiquettes among nurses. As Muslim healthcare professionals, Islamic virtues should be practiced in performing our daily duties when dealing with patients. The virtues can be practiced regardless to whether the patient has acute or chronic condition and whether the patient is a Muslim or non-Muslim. Islam teaches use several *akhlaq* or *adaab* when dealing with the sick. These virtues should be implemented in patients regardless of religious background.

3.1.1 Sincere (*Ikhlaas*)

The nurse should be sincere in helping patients to recover. Islam teaches us to be compassionate to one another. The Prophet elucidated the relationship between Muslims:

"You see the believers as regards their being merciful among themselves and showing love among themselves and being kind, resembling one body, so that, if any part of the body is not well then the whole body shares the sleeplessness (insomnia) and fever with it."

Recorded by Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari⁶

3.1.2 Dedicated (*Ihsaan*)

The nurse should be dedicated in her work. The believers should always strive for the best. *Ihsaan* is doing thing to the best of a person capabilities. In *ibaadah*, the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) mentioned in a long narration:

"Ihsaan is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, then (take it for granted that) Allah sees you."

Recorded by Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari⁷

Taking lessons from the narration, we should be dedicated in performing our duties. Work in Islam is considered as *ibaadah* as long as it is permissible, beneficial and done for the sake of God. We should perform our duties with dedication and may our duties be considered as good deeds.

3.1.3 Trustworthy (*Amaanah*)

Trustworthiness (*Amaanah*) is mentioned several times in the Quran and is a commendable character:

One of the two women said, "Dear father, hire him; the best man you can hire is someone who is strong, trustworthy."

⁶ Sahih al-Bukhari, Good Manners and Form (Al-Adaab) (Book 78), Hadith 42 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/78/42> on 8 April 2018

⁷ Sahih al-Bukhari, Prophetic Commentary on the Quran (Book 65), Hadith 4777 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/urn/44550> on 8 April 2018

Al-Quran: Surah al-Qasas, 28: 26

Trustworthiness is an important quality that medical healthcare professionals should have. This character is wanted when dealing with patient confidentiality, reporting patient condition, delivering treatment and communicating with fellow healthcare workers and patient's relatives.

3.1.4 Patience/steadfastness (*Sabr*)

The importance of having patience was emphasized by the Prophet:

“Al-Wudu is half of faith, and All praise is due to Allah (Al-Ḥamdulillāh) fills the Scale, and Glory is to Allah and all praise is to Allah (Subḥān Allāh wal-Ḥamdulillāh) fill” - or - “fills what is between the heavens and the earth, and Salat is light and charity is an evidence, and patience is an illumination, and the Quran is a proof for you or against you. And all people shall come to the morning selling their souls, either setting it free or destroying it.”

Recorded by Imam at-Tirmidhi in Jami' at-Tirmidhi⁸

Taking care of the sick is in of itself a challenge. Apart from administering medications, the daily duty of a nurse includes catering for the patient's daily needs, such as cleanliness, feeding and mobilization. Caring for someone who is not known personally to the care-giver requires patience and perseverance. We pray that God give His rewards in abundance to dedicated nurses for their diligence in taking care of patients.

3.1.5 Smile

Smile is considered a virtue and is a wanted practice whenever dealing with other human beings. The importance of smiling is mentioned by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.):

"Every good is charity. Indeed among the good is to meet your brother with a smiling face, and to pour what is left in your bucket into the vessel of your brother."

Recorded by Imam at-Tirmidhi in Jami' at-Tirmidhi⁹

⁸ Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Chapters on Supplications (Book 48), Hadith 148 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/48/148> on 9 April 2018

⁹ Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Chapters on Righteousness And Maintaining Good Relations With Relative (Book 27), Hadith 76 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/27/76> on 9 April 2018

3.1.6 Making supplications for the sick

Making supplications for the sick is a commendable act taught to us by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.):

Ibn Abbas (r.a.) reported that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) visited a bedouin who was sick. Whenever he visited an ailing person, he would say, "La ba'sa, tahurun in sha' Allah [No harm, (it will be a) purification (from sins), if Allah wills]."

Narrated by al-Bukhari
Recorded by an-Nawawi in Riyadh as-Solihin¹⁰

Being a nurse opens the opportunity to practice this *sunnah* as patients are encountered in their daily work.

3.1.7 Preserve *aurah* and patient's modesty

Healthcare professionals often have to deal with condition in which the *aurah* of the patient is exposed. Examples of such situations are in the urology ward where the continuous bladder drainage insertion is required and the maternity ward where per vaginal examination is needed. In such conditions, applying the principles of *dharurat* or necessity, where preservation of health and life take precedents; the *aurah* of the patient takes a lower priority.

The healthcare provider should at all time, observe professional conducts around the patient and at their very best preserved the patients' modesty. Ideally care-giver of the same gender of the patient is preferable; however, the availability and the expertise of the care-giver should be taken into consideration as not to jeopardize patients care.

3.1.8 Life-long learning

Due to the dynamic nature of healthcare sciences, healthcare providers should have the commitment for life-long learning. This is to ensure that patients' cares are optimum in accordance to current evidences for best outcome.

Apart from updating themselves with the current knowledge in medicine, the healthcare professionals should also equip themselves with knowledge with regards to Islamic studies such as the Islamic world-view of health and illness, *fiqh ibaadah* (the Laws

¹⁰ Riyadh as-Solihin, The Book of Visiting the Sick (Book 7), Hadith 14, accessed from <https://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/7/14> on 9 April 2018

pertaining to worship) for the sick, *rukhsah* (allowances for the sick in performing *ibadaah*) etcetera.

3.2 Giving advice on Islamic principles to patients

Giving advice to one another is part of Islamic teachings. As Muslim nurses, giving advice is part of their daily duties.

- (1) By time
- (2) Indeed, mankind is in loss
- (3) Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience

Al-Quran: Surah al-'Asr 104: 1-3

Apart from giving medical advice, giving advice related to the Islamic principles is a commendable act. This is not only applicable to nurses, but to other healthcare professionals as well. Although encouraged, the advice given to patients should be delivered in a tactful manner during appropriate times. Some of the issues with regards to the Islamic principles that should be dealt with are described in the following paragraphs.

The nurses should be aware of the patient's attitude towards illness. The Muslim patient should see illness as a test from God and expiation of sins. However, this understanding should not deter a person from seeking healthcare.

"Some Bedouins asked: 'O Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) shall we treat (our ill)?' He said: 'Yes, O worshipers of Allah! Use remedies. For indeed Allah did not make a disease but He made a cure for it' - or - 'a remedy. Except for one disease.' They said: 'O Messenger of Allah (s.a.w)! What is it?' He said: 'Old age.'"

Recorded by at-Tirmidhi in Jami' at-Thirmidhi¹¹

They also should realize the illness has been pre-destined in terms of the time, severity and characteristics of its occurrence. In other word the patient should understand the principles of *Qada'* and *Qadr*. However, similarly, this understanding should not prevent them from seeking medical help or *ikhtiyar* (i.e. looking for a cure). Jabir (r.a.) reported that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said:

¹¹ Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Chapters on Medicine (English Translation Vol. 4, Book 2), Hadith 2013 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/urn/673410> on 9 April 2018

“There is a remedy for every malady, and when the remedy is applied to the disease it is cured with the permission of Allah, the Exalted and Glorious.”

Recorded by Muslim in Shahih Muslim¹²

In term of looking for cure, the patient should also realize that medical practices should be appropriate and logical to the rule set by God for smooth-running of the universe (i.e. *sunnatullah fi al-kaun*). In health, the concept of *sunnatullah fi al-kaun* can be understood when we discuss specific etiology for specific diseases. For example, streptococcal infection is a known etiology for post-streptococcal glomerulo-nephritis. Attribution of diseases inappropriate to its etiology and risk factors is due to lack of understanding of this concept. The rule of causality (cause and effect) plays a major role in understanding health and illnesses.

Similarly in seeking treatment, appropriate measure or *ikhtiyaar* should be sought. Seeking inappropriate treatment against the general laws of nature would be inconsistent with the rule of causality.

In illness, the Muslim is encouraged to seek for the cure. However the cure must be logical and consistent with the rule of causality and *sunnatullah fi al-kaun*.

In relation to this issue, the patients with chronic condition are likely to be exposed to such problems rather than the acutely ill. The chronic patients who are in denial of their medical conditions either would refuse to seek medical help or inappropriately attribute their conditions to other factors. They may also seek treatment from hearsays and sources which is not in conformity with the principles of causality.

In the acutely ill patients, the severity of the condition may cloud their understanding of *Qada'* and *Qadr* with regards to the illness. At times we would also see acutely ill patients seeking inappropriate sources of cure. In extreme cases, the act of seeking sources of cure may violate the principles of *Tawheed* such as asking help from soothsayers and shamans.

Carrying out intervention on such patients' attitude through advice giving by nurses and other healthcare provider is important to ensure favorable outcome.

3.3 Facilitating the act of worship for Muslim patients

¹² Shahih Muslim, Book of Greetings (Book 39), Hadith 95 accessed from <https://sunnah.com/muslim/39/95> accessed on 9 April 2018

The healthcare providers should also help the patient in performing the daily obligation such as cleanliness and *solah*. This is more relevant in those who are acutely ill. Therefore the nurses should be equipped with knowledge of *fiqh al-ibaadah* (the laws with regards to worship) for the sick. Apart from being equipped with the knowledge, the nurses should also be comfortable talking about it with the patients

The nurses should be able to give advice on issues pertaining to cleanliness (*tahaarah*), the allowances for the sick (*rukhsah*) and facilitate the performance of the five obligatory formal prayers (*solah*).

The issues pertaining to worship are usually a concern to those who have acute illness, whereby they become totally or partially dependent on caretakers. For the chronic patients, limitation of movements is an issue in performing acts of worship.

At times, questions on the obligatory fasting (*saum*) will also be asked.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Islam teaches us that there are certain virtues which are commendable for healthcare professionals to adopt when dealing with patients, regardless of their religious background and faith, such as being dedicated, compassionate, honest, and patience.

Taking into account the patient's needs, patients with acute conditions have different issues compared from those with chronic conditions. Issues with regards to *Tahweed*, *Qada'*, *Qadr* and *Ikhtiyar* are more relevant to patients' who are chronically ill, while performing the act of cleanliness and worship are more relevant to the acutely ill patients. However these issues are not mutually exclusives for both types of patients.

In essence, when inculcating Islamic values while dealing with patients with acute and chronic conditions, all three components in Islam should be taken into consideration. The nurses should have the Islamic virtues (*Akhlaq*), patients attitudes towards health and illness should be addressed especially with regards to their beliefs (*Tawheed*) and they should be facilitated on performing their daily act of worship (*Shari'ah*) whenever required.