



Prophetic Medicine, Islamic Medicine, Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM): Revisiting Concepts and Definitions

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Abstract

At the present time, attention to traditional, protective, complementary and natural applications of medicine is on the rise. Religious medical therapies is a special case of curiosity. For Muslims, Prophetic Medicine (al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī) and Islamic Medicine, are gaining popularity as a reflection of love to their Prophet, Mohamed, and Sunnah (his traditions) perception. Al-Ṭib al-Nabawī refers to the curative treatments and preventive medicine reported in the Prophetic guidance and practice. After the demise of the Prophet and the rise of Islam, a vast literature had been written in these fields. Some confusions are arising and questions being asked: is Prophetic Medicine and Islamic Medicine the same thing? What is this new term "Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine"? How those practices, if distinct, are interconnected to each other? And how related to alternative and complementary medicine? The issue of how to understand the Prophetic medicine has become a subject of interest for Muslims vis-à-vis to others in fields of modern medical sciences. This exploration is an initiative to critically review, analyze and construct, within contemporary understanding and practices, the existing formulations and definitions of Prophetic and Islamic Medicine, to propose answers to those arising questions.

Keywords: Prophetic Medicine; al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī; Islamic Medicine; Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine; Alternative and Complementary Medicine

Introduction

Alternative, complementary and integrative applications of medicine are attracting global attraction. In a region like the Middle East, religious beliefs are strong and widespread, and in contrast to the orthodox modern medicine, religious and spiritual care is increasingly considered a vital part of holistic patient care, inherently good for the patient, deepens the caring staff-patient-family relationship, and enhances understanding of how beliefs influence care decisions. A special case of such applications for the Arab-Islamic region is the religiously based medical practices referred to as "Prophetic Medicine/al- Ṭibb al-Nabawī [1]. The example of Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace, is explicitly commended

in the Qur'an as the best pattern for believers to follow, his practice and precepts have been therefore a source of legal judgments and general guidance in the affairs of Muslims since the earliest days of Islam, a source which supplements and is second only to the Qur'an [2]. Since health is so important a part of human well-being, it is not surprising that Muslims over the centuries devoted so much effort to recording and reflecting upon what the Prophet taught about maintaining good health, preventing and curing diseases and ailments.[2] The popularity of Prophetic Medicine/al- Ṭibb al-Nabawī is a reflection of Muslims' love and adoration to their Prophet and to his traditions, the Sunnah perception, not necessarily requiring scientist examination [3]. Suffering caused by illness in itself is con-

sidered in that believe a spiritual test from the Almighty Creator, Allah, a test of faith in Him, in the meantime expunging sins and misdeeds [4]. But for the some who consider religious therapies as sacred practices, a confusing situation has emerged, since misinformation, distortion and false applications of those therapies may end up with a threat to health, sacredness thus challenged! [3]. Medical practices traditionally and throughout history have been an accumulation of observations and scientific contributions to reassure safety, efficacy and people satisfaction: "Ars longa, vita brevis: Art is long, and life is short"; a living example is the ingredients used for ophtalamia or "trachoma" described in the Egypt Papyrus, 2700s BC, are still similar to today's medicine ingredients. [1] The evolutionary line in the progress of the information process has, however, been interrupted by gaps of ups and downs, as not all the information and the societies getting information have always progressed in that evolutionary line [1]. Egyptian science was in its highest in the period 3000s BC, then fell behind in the period between 2000 BC and 5th AD century, Ancient Greeks and Roman science took considerable steps in the BC centuries, then declined after the 4th century [5-7].

Intertwining terms or clash of definitions?

For decades World Health Organization (WHO) is endeavoring to revive traditional medical practices globally, a comprehensive term used to refer both to traditional medicine systems, such as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), Indian Ayurveda, Arabic-Unani medicine, and to various forms of indigenous medicine [8]. WHO defined traditional medicine as: "the sum total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures that are used to maintain health, as well as to prevent, diagnose, improve or treat physical and mental illnesses" [9]. Two examples are widely known, namely Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Ayurvedic medicine. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a healing system of Eastern medicine rooted in the ancient philosophy of Taoism and developed in China more than 2,000 years ago, incorporating Chinese herbal medicine, dietary therapies, various mind and body practices, such as acupuncture, moxibustion, and tui na (Chinese therapeutic massage), tai chi and qi gong (combination of specific movements or postures, coordinated breathing, and mental focus), to treat or prevent health problems [10]. Ayurvedic medicine is one of the world's oldest medical systems originated in India more than 3,000 years ago and consisted of individualized treatments including compounds of herbs or propetry ingredients and diet, exercise, and lifestyle recommendations [11]. A vibrant and expansive sys-

tem of healing traditions thriving and pervading modern life in the Arab and Muslim world, though not yet attracting the deserved attention globally, is what has been recently described as the "Traditional Arabic and Islamic/Prophetic medicine" "TAIM" [12]. Idioms used to connote TAIM healing traditions, and which are sometimes used interchangeably, include Graeco-Arabic or Unani medicine, Islamic Medicine, al-Tibb Nabawi or medicine of the Prophet [8]. This reflects the historical roots in ancient Arabic medicine, when Arab herbalists, pharmacologists, chemists and physicians in the middle ages adopted the ancient medicinal practices of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Persia and India; they have also introduced medical innovations which included the discovery of the immune system, the introduction of microbiological science and the separation of medicine from pharmacological science [13]. Despite an extant, though finite, literature on the various practices of these healing traditions, no clear and concise model exists to distinguish and organize their multiple, intertwined elements [12]. Thus the emergence of the recent proposal: "Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine, or "TAIM" [14]. It's an encompassing term recognizing traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine as one system in an attempt to embrace the entirety of the historical roots and breadth of practices, and to represent an innovative step forward. A "TAIM" working definition and a conceptual framework to delineate its scope is a push forward to meet an unmet need for advancing clinical and academic applications of this healing tradition. In their scholarly effort, the authors suggested a conceptual framework of TAIM that adopted the same patterns and taxonomy of the theoretical frameworks of western complementary and eastern traditional healing systems, such as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Ayurveda [15]. TAIM model has thus included manipulative and massage techniques, herbal medicine, dietary practices, meditation, and exercise [12,16].

As such, they have defined TAIM as "a system of healing practiced since antiquity in the Arab world within the context of religious influences of Islam to be comprised of medicinal herbs (e.g. black seed), dietary practices (e.g. bees honey, Zamzam water, observing a fast), mind-body practices (e.g. Islamic ritual prayer, Dhi-kr) spiritual healing (e.g. Quranic healing, recitations, devotions, supplications, Rugia) and applied therapy (e.g. cupping-hijama, hydrotherapy, massage)[12]. Is then TAIM, Prophetic Medicine and Islamic Medicine the same thing? Or those multiple elements reflected an enduring interconnectivity between Islamic medical and Prophetic influences, as well as regional healing practices emerging from specific geographical and cultural origins?.

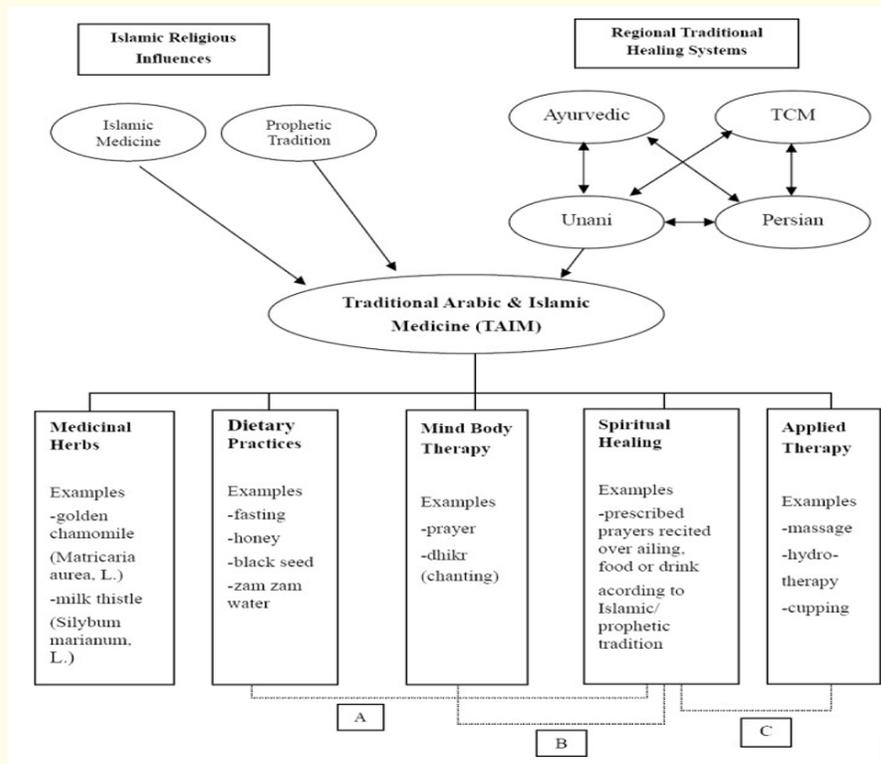


Figure 1: A Unifying Conceptual Model of Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM), Reproduced from: Al-Rawi S and Fetters MD. Traditional Arabic and Islamic Medicine: A Conceptual Model for Clinicians and Researchers. *Global Journal of Health Science*. 2012; 4 (3): 164-69].

- A. Dietary practices derived from Islamic/Prophetic tradition include prescription for fasting and drinking Zam zam water.
- B. Mind-body therapy practices originating from Islamic/Prophetic tradition include prayer.
- C. Applied therapy consequential of Islamic/Prophetic tradition include cupping.

Dismantling *ṭibb al-nabawī* from islamic medicine:

Some scholars tend to mix these two genres of medicine that evolved during the Islamic era. However, to most scholars, those two entities, though related, are considerably different. In the first place there is a historical difference. Prophetic Medicine was developed during the time of Prophet Muhammad, while Islamic Medicine is a continuation of endeavors reaching its peak during the Islamic civilization era, the Islamic Golden Age, spanning the 8th to the 15th Centuries. The emphasis on the historical formulations is underpinned by one of the famous contemporary scholars in the field who considered Prophetic Medicine as originating during the time of Prophet Muhammad, while Islamic Medicine is a continuation of endeavors peaking up at the 8th to the 15th Centuries of the Islamic Golden Age. He suggested a comprehensive

definition of Prophetic Medicine, as a science that combines all that has come to us from the Messenger of Allah related to the subject of medicine, including verses of the Qur’ān, the blessed Prophetic Traditions (aḥādīth), the prescriptions of the Prophet as he administered treatment to some of his Companions when they asked him for cures, or when he instructed them in some remedy, his advices concerning healthy living of a human being pertaining to his food and drink, his dwelling and marriage, also covering the injunctions related to medicine and medication, the etiquettes to be observed and the legal responsibilities of the practitioner[17].

Another difference, as previously discussed, is the fact that Prophetic Medicine was founded on basis of the sayings and actions of the Prophet, mostly focusing on herbal lore, hygiene, dietary practices, exercise regimes, as such related to dietary recommen-

dations and restrictions, general health and hygiene, first aid measures, treatment and prescriptions, which were grouped together and made as "Prophetic Medicine or al-Ṭibb al-Nabawi [18]. In contrast, Islamic Medicine is that body of knowledge of Medicine that was inherited by Muslims in the early phase of Islamic history (40-247 AH/661-861 AD) from mostly Greek sources, but to which became added medical knowledge from, Persia, Syria, India and Byzantine, which was not only become translated into Arabic, the literary and scientific lingua franca of the time, but was to be expounded, assimilated, exhaustively added to and subsequently codified, and 'islamicized' [19]. Nagamia gave a lengthy description about 'Bait-ul-Hikma' or House of Wisdom which was founded in 214 AH 830 AD by the Abasi Caliph Al-Mamun, as the resource of development of Islamic Medicine, who sent an emissary to the Byzantine Emperor to get all scientific manuscripts and books of the ancient Greek physicians, philosophers and scientists, that were apparently stored in an old and dilapidated building, how translations of all of these was immediately started. The effect of the House of Wisdom was tremendous which, not only on medicine but also in agriculture, philosophy, art, architecture, prosperity, economic benefactors, diplomacy, etiquette and Islamic Science at large [19].

A third important difference elicited by most Muslim historians and physicians is that while Prophetic Medicine is characterized by its theological and doctrine contents, Islamic medicine is a more scientific and analytical medicine, Islamic scholars and physicians gathered knowledge from across the known world, expanded earlier medical sciences and added to it their own findings and discoveries [18,20]. It amplified preexisting theoretical principles of medicine into a comprehensive system of medicine thus achieving many great advances of their times. The concept of Islamic Medicine is, however, still elusive. Kasule defined it as "*a medicine whose basic paradigms, concepts, values, and procedures conform to or do not contradict the Qur'an and Sunnah*" [21]. Another contemporary definition by IMANA, the Islamic Medical Association of North America, states that Islamic Medicine is the "*art and science of practice of medicine by Muslim physicians and other health care providers in the service of humanity under Islamic guidelines as ordained by the divine book al-Qur'an and taught by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him*" [22]. More recently Saniotis took us to the historical roots of Islamic medicine suggesting that "*Islamic medicine is the body of medical knowledge and practice which began in the early Islamic period and which is being currently practiced by Muslim physicians in Muslim and non-Muslim countries*" [23].

Tracing the Development of Prophetic Medicine:

The companions of the Prophet transmitted to subsequent generations their reports of his sayings (Hadiths) and actions, both referred to as Sunnah Tradition; collections of these reports were compiled later by the Muslim authors, which came to be known as "Books of Hadith/Books of Sunnah" [18]. The authors of these collections inquired deeply into the authenticity of these collections, the most famous of which are those of al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH/870 CE) who was regarded by Muslims as the most authentic, Muslim (d. 261/875), al-Tirmithi (d. 279/892) and others. Robson in his Encyclopedia of Islam explained the methodology followed in this science of Sunnah: the chain of narrators of each report was recorded, each one of narrators in the chain scrutinized in depth to ensure his or her veracity and truthfulness, degrees of authentication then assigned to each report depending upon the outcome of this rigorous analysis before being accepted for inclusion in the works of these scholars [24].

Prophetic medicine includes multidisciplinary acts and practices that are widespread in the Sunnah/Ahadith and Islamic jurisprudence books, and not necessary under the title of Prophetic Medicine. Vivid examples are the practice of ablution, purification after urination or defecation (Istinja), fasting, performing prayers, which, though of marked health benefits, were mentioned under other jurisprudence and Hadiths topics and not as Prophetic medicine. In the meantime most Hadith and Islamic jurists and scholars restricted the term Prophetic medicine to the Prophetic curative practices [25]. It was only later that the sayings related to dietary recommendations and restrictions, general health and hygiene, first aid measures, treatment and prescriptions, were grouped together in one chapter dealing with health matters, which were then studied in much greater details by Islamic jurists and scholars who wrote elaborate commentaries on them and made them available to Muslim populace as "Prophetic Medicine or al-Ṭibb al-Nabawi [18]. There are many collections under the title "Prophetic Medicine" in world libraries and museums. Albar explored references to some forty different books, some published some lost, with the title 'Prophetic Medicine' [2]. The most widespread book on 'Prophetic Medicine' was that written by Ibn Qayim al-Jawziyah (691-751AH/1293-1351), included in his famous collection "Zad Almiad" (Provisions for the Hereafter) [18,26]. Another fairly comprehensive and authentic collection is by Al-Dhabi, a famous traditionalist and historian, who according to FazlurRahman, concentrated more on religious doctrine while others mainly gave prescriptions [27].

Recently, the number of publications on Prophetic Medicine as a whole or on different areas of it has been growing rapidly. There are many books and articles, referenced with ahadith (sayings) of the Prophet on the curative properties of honey, black seed (*Nigella Sativa*), senna (*Casiacutifolia*), henna (*Lawsonia Inermis*), aloes (*Aloe Vera*), garlic and onions, olive oil, etc.; on the positive health benefits of breast feeding, and of the Islamic practices of fasting, prayers, ablution, cleaning the teeth and mouth, etc. Doctors in particular have been very active in elucidating the relevant ahadith and their importance to health promotion and disease prevention. Current issues in medical ethics from an Islamic perspective have also received a great deal of attention in recent times. There are literally hundreds of articles, books and doctoral dissertations on organ transplantation, brain death, new methods of procreation including test-tube babies and surrogacy, abortion, contraception, cloning and genetic engineering [2].

Was mohamed a prophet or a physician?

Arabia before the birth of Muhammad had been a culturally isolated and economically underdeveloped region [28]. Exploring the pre-Islamic Arab culture within a contextual and historical perspective, it was underdeveloped compared with other civilizations, the information they had did not pass further from folkloric medicine, despite their site-specific vegetation and mineral resources [3]. Healers coming to Makkah in the days of Arabic fairs, and the few limited number of individuals who developed themselves by taking medical education in Anatolia, Iraq and Iran, were an exception [3]. Prophet Mohamed was born in Makkah, in the Arabian Peninsula, in an aristocratic clan of the Quraysh sometime in the year 570/571 CE. He lived as a person of the same culture, to be later privileged by prophecy and revelation. His birth heralded the culmination and perfection of the guidance from Allah to mankind, as mentioned in the Qur'anic verse: "...This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion" [29,30]. This "perfection" is embodied in the Quran, the main source of all inspirational knowledge in Islam considered by Muslims or followers of Islam to be the word of Allah or God, revealed by Him to the Prophet of Islam: Mohamed. It's is a book of guidance, a religious book par excellence, and not typically a scientific book, nor a book of medicine, health, or pharmacy, however, it contains many essential narrations on creation, universe, earth, astronomy, physiology, environment, animal and vegetable reproduction, breeding, pharmacy, medicine and medicinal plants [31]. A secondary source of a Muslim's inspiration is the "Hadith or Sunnah" which are the recorded and authenticated sayings, deeds, traditions and approvals of Prophet Mohamed in all aspects and walks of life. These tradi-

tions, or Sunnah, is considered the manifestation and interpretation of the Quran. In this respect he wasn't then sent as a physician or doctor, but his words and actions with reference to prevention and treatment of disease and care of patients described what was then called al-Ṭibb al-Nabaw. Included into its sphere are health and medical matters, medical treatment practiced either by others on the Prophet, by the Prophet on himself and others, or observed by the Prophet with no objections, as well medical procedures the Prophet heard or knew about and did not prohibit, and his guidance on physical and mental health, hygiene and public and environmental health, universally applicable to patients, at any time, and under all circumstances [31]. Quran together with the Sunnah catalyzed the seeking of knowledge and scientific enquiry within the context of the Islamic ethos and provided unequivocal direction and insights into all fields of knowledge, ranging from the basic physical and social sciences through to philosophy and medicine and healthcare. In fact the Golden Age of Muslim civilization reached its peak purely because of this guidance that provided insights into every field of knowledge [30]. Muslim scholars saw the collection and transmission of medical knowledge as acts of piety, since the Prophet identified health as important, and by relying on the healers of his time and their treatments, established their craft was religiously valid and beneficial [27]. According to some of the important narrations of God's Messenger, a Muslim always endeavors to find causation of disease and to seek cure,, and if a cause for a disease has not yet been found, one needs to keep on looking for until one is found. Al-Imam Ahmed, the great Hadith and Sunnah scholar and scientist, reported on the authority of Usama ibn Shurayk, a known companion of the Prophet, that: 'Some nomads came and asked 'O Messenger of Allahh, should we treat the sick?' He ereplied: 'Yes O servants of Allah treat your sick for Allah the Glorious One did not make any disease, without making a cure for it, except one, old age' [32].

Prophetic medicine: bound in time or sacred?

The Prophet not only instructed sick people to take medicine, but he himself invited expert physicians for this purpose [33]. His opinions on health issues, and habits with regard to leading a healthy life, were collected early on, and edited as a separate corpus of writings under the title Ṭibb an-Nabī ("The Medicine of the Prophet"). Whether all his statements were information that Allah tendered, or out of his humanitarian experience, is a long time debate. This situation, however, shouldn't defer giving it a definition. Prophetic medicine tradition denotes the methods applied and medicines advised by Prophet Muhammad that has penetrated the depths of Muslim societies' medical culture [34]. In this respect,

two fundamental perceptions about Prophetic medicine prevailed from the earliest years of Islam. For some scholars this tradition is regarded as sacred, it deploys religious values, whatever the Prophet said and did is the information given approval through Allah's revelation. One important example of this school was Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), the great Islamic scholar with in-depth knowledge of Qur'anic commentaries, Islamic jurisprudence, and the Hadith, in his work on Prophetic Medicine argued that the medical advices and practices of the Prophet are divine and based on revelation, have binding nature on believers, has such a wisdom that even the greatest doctors would feel incompetent, and is different from and superior to medical assumptions of specialized doctors based on experiments and experience [26]. A second school of thought considers that just statements submitted by Prophet Muhammad about religion are consequence of revelation, while his human attitudes and information were his own inherent characteristics and representations of the Arabic culture of his era [35]. Medical applications and advice of the Prophet for this group fall under the category of the Prophetic saying narrated by the Hadith scholar, Al-Imam Muslim: "You are more knowledgeable of your worldly affairs matters" [36]. Ibn Khaldun (d.808/1405) and Shah Waliyu Allah Dahlawi (d.1176/1762) were among the scholars who approved this opinion [37,38]. They considered Prophetic narrations on medical affairs as advices bound to his time and the Arab medical practices thereof, and not based on revelation. History in fact supports this view by the fact that medical applications have taken roots for long centuries and have crossed into other cultures and geographies (Maalim Al-Qur'an Wa AL-Sunnah). Cupping Therapy, Hijima, for example was long known in Ancient Egypt and China, then practiced by pre-Islamic Arabs, and finally been approved by the Prophet, who himself used to call Hijima practitioners known at his time to do cupping for him for a variety of painful conditions [39].

These main generic approaches of whether Prophetic Medicine is bound in time or sacred still continue up to our present time.

Conclusion

Healthcare is one of the greatest challenges of the new millennium. Not only are we faced with many infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and meningitis, but also an unprecedented increase in diseases of lifestyle such as hypertension, diabetes and obesity, which have reached alarming proportions. As a reflection, there is a new and growing attention towards traditional and natural health regimes. In many Arab and Islamic coun-

tries a work has started and been going on to revive the concepts of Prophetic medicine and Islamic medicine, which are, though distinct, are interconnected to the one goal and emphasis on a healthy lifestyle both physically and spiritually, underpinned with the understanding that 'prevention is better than cure', as the way to play an important role in addressing issues of current healthcare. The greatest challenge is how to adapt those cultural and religious perspectives to modern daily needs and medical practice, how to include training in traditional and Prophetic medicine in the medical curricula in universities, how to educate herbalists and practitioners of traditional medicine to improve their standards of understanding and their techniques in preparing and prescribing traditional remedies. Those needs prerequisite comprehensive working definitions and practical frameworks that are clear, flexible, critically synthesized, finer, all-embracing and universal.

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