

A Physician's Ethical Duties from Kholasah al Hekmah [1770]

In 1770 AD, during Persia's Islamic era, Mohamad Hosin Aghili of Shiraz wrote the work Kholasah al Hekmah. The first chapter of that work contains a list of ethical duties for the physician, which are printed here in condensed form.

1. A physician must not be conceited; he should know that the actual healer is God.
2. He should praise his teachers and professor and return thanks to them for their kindness.
3. He should never slander another physician. The fault of others should occasion the recognition of his own fault, not be the occasion for pride and conceit.
4. He must speak to patients with civility and good humour and never get angry at the misbehaviour and insults of patients.
5. He must protect the patient's secrets and not betray them, especially to those the patients do not know want to know.
6. In the case of the transmission of disease, the physician must not turn the second patient against the first.
7. He must be energetic in studying diseases and drugs and earnest in the diagnosis and treatment of a patient or disease.
8. He must never be tenacious in his opinion, and continue in his fault or mistake but, if it is possible, he is to consult with proficient physicians and ascertain the facts.
9. If someone mentions a useless or wrong idea, he must not turn it down definitely but say politely, "Maybe it is true in some cases but, in my opinion, in this case it is more probably such and such."
10. If a prior physician has a better knowledge of a patient or disease, he has to encourage the patient to return to the first physician.
11. If he is not successful in the treatment of a case or if he has found the patient did not have confidence in his work or that the patient would like to refer to another physician, it is better to offer an excuse and ask him to consult another physician.
12. He must not be prejudiced against any method of treatment and never continue any wrong practice.
13. In the treatment of disease, he must begin with simple medicine and not recommend any drug as long as the nature of the disease is resistant to it and it would not be effective.
14. If a patient has several diseases, first of all he has to cure the main disease which may be the cause of complications.
15. He should never recommend any kind of fatal, harmful or enfeebling drugs; he has to know that as a physician he has to do what is conducive to the patient's temperament, and temperament itself is an efficient corrector and protector of the body, not fatal or destructive.
16. He must not be proud of his class or his family and must not regard others with contempt.
17. He must not withhold medical knowledge; he should teach it to everyone in medicine without any discrimination between poor and rich, noble or slave.
18. He must not hold his students or his patients under his obligation.
19. He must be content, grateful, generous and magnanimous, and never be covetous, greedy, ravenous or jealous.

20. He must never covet another's property. If someone offers him a present while he himself is in need of it, he must not accept it.
21. He must never claim that he can cure an impoverished patient who has gone to many physicians, and should jeopardize his own reputation.
22. He should never be gluttonous and become involved in pleasure-seeking, buffoonery, drinking and other sins.
23. He must not look upon women with lust but must look at them as he looks at his daughter, sister or mother.

(from: Reich WT (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, revised edition Vol 5. Simon & Schuster MacMillan, New York, 1995)