

Healthy Ageing in Iranian Traditional Medicine's Resources in the Occasion of the World Health Day 2012

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AGEING

Concerns each and every one of us – whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor – no matter where we live. Every year, World Health Day is celebrated on 7 April to mark the anniversary of the founding of World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948 and each year a theme is selected for World Health Day that highlights a priority area of concern for WHO. The topic in 2012 is *Ageing and health* with the theme “Good health adds life to years”. The focus is, how good health throughout life can help older men and women lead full and productive lives and be a resource for their families and communities.^[1]

World Health Organization promotes a healthy lifestyle across the life-course to save lives, protect health and alleviate disability and pain in older age. Age-friendly environments and early detection of disease, as well as, prevention and care improve the wellbeing of older people. Population ageing will hamper the achievement of socioeconomic and human development goals if action is not taken today.^[2]

DEFINITION OF AGEING /AGING

Most developed world countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition of ‘elderly’ or older person, but the United Nations agreed cutoff is 60+ years to refer to the

older population.^[3] And, also in 3 of four main encyclopedias of Iranian Traditional Medicine [End notes]; Kamel-al-Sanaah,^[4] Canon of Medicine,^[5] Zakhireye Khawrazmshahi,^[6] which are written by Ahvazi, Avicenna and Jorjani respectively, the mentioned cutoff is 60+ years.

Population ageing means the process by which older individuals become a proportionally larger share of the total population. It was one of the most distinctive demographic events of the 20th century and also will surely remain important throughout the 21st century. Initially experienced by the more developed countries, the process has recently become apparent in much of the developing world as well. For the near future, virtually all countries will face population ageing, although at varying levels of intensity and in different time frames.^[7]

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HYGIENE AND PREMATURE AGING, FROM THE VIEWPOINTS OF RHAZES AND AVICENNA

Although aging is an inevitable phenomenon, and it is impossible to escape, but it can be delayed for a long time, with cleanliness, proper nutrition, adequate sleep and welfare.^[8] It should be noted that the hygiene is not the art, which

might avert death or extraneous injuries. It also does not secure the utmost longevity possible to the human beings in general. But it guarantees two things: a) initial prevention of putrefaction. b) Safeguarding of innate moisture from too rapid a dispersion. Every person has a certain limit in resisting the inevitable desiccation according to his temperament, innate heat and the quantity of the innate moisture. He cannot cross that limit but sometimes he may die even earlier owing to causes which produce- early desiccation or to cause which prove fatal in one way or the other. Many persons assert that the former types of death are natural and the latter are accidental. *The art of preserving health aims at guiding the human body to reach the age, which is called natural span of life by paying attention to things suitable for health.*^[9]

Although, geriatric medicine and health is one of the branches of modern medicine, but there is much in this regard in the main resources of Iranian traditional medicine, which represents the fact that this important subject has already been noted before the increasing of elderly population. But has wrongly been addressed to as the scientific achievement of the second half of the 20th century. For example, we encountered with more than 500 related terms, including many current geriatric medical topics/titles in various chapters and main topics of Avicenna's Canon of Medicine and more in another main resources of Traditional Medicine. In addition, there was a detailed description of health issues, healthy eating and drinking, sport and sleeping programs of old people. Furthermore, other subjects such as effect of environmental factors on early premature aging, the effect of aging on the susceptibility and resistance to infectious diseases, severe fevers, and fatal pains were also addressed in these books.^[10]

Considering the increase in our population life expectancy, obvious changes happening to the life pyramid that is leading to an increase in elderly population, and their present and future medical and health needs; it is required to paying more attention to this important field of medicine and health (Geriatrics) in our medical education and research policy at the Ministry of Health, with a reference to leading ideas! Views of our scientists of 1,200 years ago and recent emphasizes made by WHO at the beginning of the new millennium and in relation to the theme of World Health Day of 2012 – Healthy Aging.

END NOTES

Rhazes (865-925) has written the first encyclopedia of traditional medicine, called al-Havi. One of the most appealing healers from a modern vantage point was the Persian Razi, called Rhazes in the West. Students and practitioners thronged to his lectures, and apparently he was also a brilliant bedside teacher. He was also an independent thinker, not afraid to rely on his own observations when they contradicted the past; he counseled others that “all that is written in books is worth much less than the experience of a wise doctor. His most celebrated work, *al-Havi*, summarized the medical and surgical knowledge of his time. Rhazes's fame rested on clear-cut clinical descriptions of illness, original observations, and a pragmatic approach to treatment. He advised proper food in preference to drugs in treatment, and recommended simple rather than complex remedies.^[1]

Ahvazi or Ali ibn al-'Abbas al-Majusi al-Ahvazi or Haly Abbas (930-994) as the writer of the second encyclopedia of traditional medicine has written his book, called *Kamel-al-Sanaah* by using monotheistic literature. Ahvazi also from the eastern caliphate, in the late tenth century wrote highly popular and perceptive commentaries on Hippocrates, Galen and Rhazes, which were standard Arabic texts before Avicenna's *Canon* came upon the scene. Early Christian translators introduced Haly Abbas's works to the West, especially his surgical writings. The name of Isaac Judaeus (Abu Ya'qub Is-hag Sulayman al-Israili) is linked with Haly Abbas because the translator Constantinus Africanus erroneously attributed to Isaac Judaeus some texts that may have been written by Haly Abbas.^{1,2}

Avicenna (850-1037) is writer of the third encyclopedia of traditional medicine, called Canon of Medicine. He has born near Bokhara, ancient Iran. He was a boy prodigy and is said to have mastered the Qoran by the age of ten. Aristotle's ideas intrigued him, and he also studied the commentators, such as al-Farabi. The entire gamut of human knowledge was within his purview: grammar, poetry, geometry, astronomy, anatomy, physiology, materia medica, and surgery. In fact, until the mid-seventeenth century, the medical curriculum of the Christian universities, including those in the British Isles, was based on Avicenna's writings.^[1]

Jorjani (1040-1136) has written the fourth encyclopedia of Iranian Traditional Medicine. Is named as *Zakhireye Khwarazmshahi*. He did for Persian science what the Bible did for English prose. By this great encyclopedia of medicine He standardized medical technical terms. The phrases which he borrowed from the Arabic text-books of Rhazes, Ahvazi and Avicenna became thereafter incorporated in the scientific language of the Persians for the use of later writers.

After Rhazes and Avicenna this work became the most consulted and the most frequently quoted of all the text-books of medicine.²

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