



## **Rhazes Contribution to the Role of Nutrition in Preventive Medicine and Public Health**

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### **Dear Editor-in-Chief**

The term of “preventive medicine” is a new terminology in medicine attempt to prevent medical disorders by influence on life style modification, environment and social factors (1). Although some great physicians are credited as the father of preventive medicine such as Louis Pasteur (1822–1895) or Richard Mead (1673–1754) (2), somebody believed the starting of this concept can be back to Moses because of his personal and public hygienic and dietary advises to his people (3). However, by review the history we can find concepts on preventive medicine older than 18<sup>th</sup> century and more complete and organize than Moses preliminary advises.

In traditional Persian medicine (TPM), Persian physicians believed people had to observe six important subjects (called as *Sette Zaroorieh* in TPM or six principles) to have healthy life and prevent acquiring diseases (4). These six items were 1- Air (importance of clean air, temperature, effect of different geographical airs on human health); 2- foods and drinks; 3- Movement and station (exercise); 4- sleep and wake; 5- Excretion and reten-

tion: excrete any unnecessary materials for the body by urine, vomit, stool, sweat, semen and menstrual blood. (Bathing and washing as well as keeping and supplying necessary materials for the body are included in this subject.); 6- Psychological and mental conditions (4,5). According to the definition of medicine (*bejeshbki* in Persian language), the first aim to each physician was defined as keeping health of each person prior to treatment (4).

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya Razi (865–925) who is known as Rhazes in the west (Fig. 1) was one of the prominent Persian physicians, chemists and pharmacists throughout the history. He had over than 200 books in medicine, chemistry, music, etc (6). Rhazes believed to these six principles like his predecessors, but he attributed to the role of nutrition more than others did. His main contribution was on diet and nutrition and its importance into keep health. He had many specific books on food and dietary such as *Manfe' al aghz'ie va maz'areba* (Benefits of Food and its Harmfulness), *al aghz'iat al mokatbareh* (Brief Facts about

Food), *Ata'me al marza* (Food for Patients), *Ma iaghdam men al favakeh va al aghziah va ma yoakbar* (Fruit Before or After Meal), and *keifiat al eghteza* (Temperament and Quality of Foods) (6).



**Fig.1:** The statue of Rhazes (865–925), placed in the School of Pharmacy, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

His special view to nutrition in medicine is unique in the history of ancient and medieval ages. In addition, in illness, he preferred to treat patients by food in advance, then by simple drugs and in last line with compound and complex drugs. He said: “If a physician can treat patient by food he has been fortu-

nate; if patient was not cure, he should to use simple drugs and in last line use compound drugs.” He instead on treatment by foods as he mentioned “If physician can treat a patient with food, he achieves bliss!” (7) He believed nutrition and diet has a critical role in prevention of illness as well as treatment. In addition, foods have less adverse effects in compression of drugs.

Although the current concept of nutrition dates back to 18<sup>th</sup> century after chemical revolution in France, but Rhazes achievement in this field shows the concept of nutrition in preventive medicine as well as treatment has a more deep history from 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. It does not seem any physicians nor before Rhazes nor after him have such believed to the role of nutrition until beginning the modern medicine.

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