MUSLIM DOCTORS AND TREATMENT OF SEX DISEASE

The sexual health in UK is now in serious decline. Figures released last month showed chlamydia up by 9 per cent and syphilis up by 26 per cent between 2002 and 2003. Diagnoses of HIV have risen 150 per cent since 1996, and it is now the fastest growing serious condition in the UK. On 11 June 2003, the House of Commons health select committee chairman David Hinchliffe said: "The committee has been appalled by some of the evidence we have received - the whole sexual health service appears to be a shambles."

It is reported that all sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have increased in England over the past six years, particularly new cases of gonorrhoea (87%), Chlamydia (108%) and syphilis (486%). Chlamydia is the commonest curable STI, with high rates in young women. The majority of infections are asymptomatic and, if untreated, can cause infertility. (The Guardian, 11 June 2003)

Andrew Lansley, the shadow health secretary and a Tory moderniser, and the health minister have been thinking to unveil their plan to crackdown on STIs. (Sunday Observer, 15 August)

The front-page headline report "Muslim GPs won't treat sex diseases" published in The Mail on Sunday on 1st August 2004, shocked and surprised Muslim community in Britain. On the next day, 2nd August 2004, two Muslim organizations, The Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the representative body of more than 420 affiliated Muslim organizations, issued press releases. "We were surprised by the front-page headline in the Mail on Sunday (Muslim GPs won't treat sex diseases, 1st August 2004) as we are not aware of any Muslim medical practitioners withholding or refusing treatment to anyone suffering from a sexually transmitted illness," the press release of the London Central Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre said.

"According to the teachings of Islam there is no scope for refusing or delaying treatment 'because patients' actions have contributed to their condition'. The statement that the Al Qur'an 'forbids Muslims doctors from helping sufferers' is completely incorrect and represents a serious misunderstanding of the teachings of Islam. We learn from the Ahadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) that for every illness God has provided a cure thus emphasising the importance of the quest for scientific knowledge and new treatments" says Dr Ahmed Al Dubayan Director General of the ICC.

Dr Shuja Shafi, Chair, Health & Medical Committee MCB says, "Muslim doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals contribute significantly and play an instrumental and widely acknowledged role in supporting all sections of our NHS. An increasing number of Muslim students work hard to enter medical and allied healthcare professional courses. They are driven by the motivation to serve and treat"
those who are ill and suffering.

Nonetheless, we would be very interested to study the dossier of complaints compiled by the senior anonymous academic to assess whether a problem actually exists and, if so, the extent of it and what can be done to address this issue. We hope that the Mail on Sunday will now furnish this evidence.

“We are working very closely with the NHS Westminster Primary Health Trust and the NAZ Project as a part of health promotion campaigns aiming to control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS. Our joints leaflets with the NAZ Project were distributed among different sections of the community, surely we do not discriminate in the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases,” says Dr Yunes Teinaz Advisor to the (ICC).

“I had not come across anyone doctor or medical student who had said they would refuse to treat patients suffering from sexual transmitted diseases. I don’t belief that there is any who would say something like this,” said Dr. Shafi in an interview with me recently.

“Even from the Islamic perspective, doctors’ duty is to treat patients and to relieve them of any suffering or pain. That’s a doctor’s duty. They are not allowed to be judgemental. There is no place in Islam for being judgemental. That is the last prerogative. That is what Allah the Almighty will do. He will punish those whom He wants to. That’s not our job.

“We are in the mainstream profession. We have to go by the code of conduct in the medical profession. If you don’t you will be penalized. You can’t practise by just having your own rules.

Dr. Shafi said, “There may well be people everywhere, a small minority of people who have their own views. I have not come across it. It is not the mainstream. A report like this has unfortunately damage the good name of the Muslim community. There are number of Muslims who are very actively employed and do a very good job even in specialties, which requires them to treat sexual diseases. I work in specialties, which involve making diagnosis as a microbiologist.”

“It is morally and professionally wrong. It is not possible to distinguish those acquired by this method or that method. Take for example, the Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C, these can be spread by sexual intercourse, or by other methods as well. How do you distinguish between the two? There is no way. Hepatitis can infect babies through their mother who may or may not be at fault. These are all classified as sexually transmitted diseases. By not giving them the treatment, you are denying them,” Dr. Shafi explained professionally.

“Allah knows best. Our Job is only to do what is good. There is a saying of the Prophet – Allah has not created any disease for which there is no cure. That is an invitation to people to look for causes of diseases, how to treat them and go on treatment. That’s how we feel,” Dr. Shafi said as a Muslim doctor.
It is a backlash thing unnecessarily. It is a very delicate moment around which we have these people talking like this which is not right," observed Dr. Shafi.

I also interviewed Dr. Ahmed Dubayan, Director General of the Islamic Cultural Centre recently, who said, "I think those who say they don’t treat patients of sexually transmitted diseases – AIDS or venereal diseases, I believe this is wrong. First of all, those people need help. We cannot say these people are paying the just price of the sin, because we are not the one to decide who are paying the just price of sin. This is something which Allah the Almighty can decide. It is not our right to express whether one person deserves mercy or not because Allah is the one who decides. As a doctor, I believe, as a Muslim, everybody should do his best and treat those who need treatment whatever it is or whatever the background of it is – certain style of life or sexual style of life."

"Unfortunately some Muslims may think that is not Islamic. We say to them, in Islam, you cannot decide about someone whether he is bad or not, you cannot decide about his destiny. This is actually the punishment of Allah or not punishment. Nobody can do this.

"Our mission is to advise people not to do it. Our mission is to spread mercy; our mission is to help others who need help, whoever they are, Muslims or non-Muslims. They are members of this community. Whether they want or don’t want they have somehow relations with the Muslims here in the community.

"I myself along with brothers in the Muslim Council of Britain and other Muslims, have repeatedly said, ‘The Muslim community is a part of the whole society. How come we think we are part of the society and we don’t help others who really need help. I am sure that Muslim community does not have lot of those people like that.”

Dr. Yunes Teinaz, the health adviser at the ICC said, "The Islamic Cultural Centre have been working very closely for many years with the NAZ project and we got leaflets in Arabic and English language carrying the NAZ project logo and ICC logo and these leaflets are to deal with the AIDS among the Muslim community, how it is treated and how it is prevented.

"Islam is not against giving treatment and preventing spread of the sexually transmitted diseases. And to my knowledge, I never come across of any doctor who will refuse to treat Muslim or non-Muslim. The doctors or medics or paramedics mission is to prevent the spread and prevalence of diseases in the community."