

Advice to a Physician, Advice of Haly Abbas (Ahwazi) [Tenth Century AD]

A leading Persian figure in medicine and medical ethics, Haly Abbas (Ahwazi), who died in 994 AD, devoted the first chapter of his work Liber Regius (Kamel Al Sanaah al Tibbia) to the ethics of medicine. An excerpt of his ethical admonition follows:

The first advice is to worship God and obey his commands; then be humble toward your teacher and endeavor to hold him in esteem, to serve and show gratitude to him, to hold him equally dear as you do your parents, and to share your possessions with him.

Be kind to the children of your teachers and if one of them wants to study medicine you are to teach him without any remuneration.

You are to prohibit the unsuited and undeserving from studying medicine.

A physician is to prudently treat his patients with food and medicine out of good and spiritual motives, not for the sake of gain. He should never prescribe or use a harmful drug or abortifacient.

A physician should be chaste, pious, religious, well-spoken, and graceful, and must avoid any kind of sinfulness or impurity. He should not look upon women with lust and never go to their home except to visit a patient.

A physician should respect confidences and protect the patient's secrets. In protecting a patient's secrets, he must be more insistent than the patient himself. A physician should follow the Hippocratic counsels. He must be kind, compassionate, merciful and benevolent, and give himself unstintingly to the treatment of patients, especially the poor. He must never expect remuneration from the poor but rather provide them free medicine. If it is not possible, he must visit them graciously whenever it is necessary, day or night, especially when they suffer from an acute disease, because the patient's condition changes very quickly with this kind of disease.

It is not proper for a physician to live luxuriously and become involved in pleasure-seeking. He must not drink alcohol because it injures the brain. He must study medical books constantly and never grow tired of research. He has to learn what he is studying and repeat and memorize what is necessary. He has to study in his youth because it is easier to memorize the subject at this age than in old age, which is the mother of oblivion.

A medical student should be constantly present in the hospital so as to study disease processes and complications under the learned professor and proficient physicians.

To be a learned and skilful physician, he has to follow this advice, develop an upright character and never hesitate to put this advice into practice so as to make his work effective, to win the patient's trust, and to receive the benefit of the patient's friendship and gratitude.

The Almighty God knows better than all...

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

