2148 - Is It Permissible to Seek Medication?

the question

What is the ruling on giving medication in Islam, especially in cases of diseases where there is no hope of a cure? Is it necessary to obtain the patient’s permission before giving treatment, particularly in emergency situations?

Summary of answer

1. Seeking medication is obligatory in cases where not giving medication could cause death, disability or the loss of a limb, or where the sickness is bound to spread if not treated, as in contagious diseases.
2. Treatment and medication are ways of utilizing the laws of cause and effect that Allah has incorporated into the running of the universe.
3. Seeking the patient’s permission depends on whether he is qualified to give it (i.e., he should be of sound mind, mature and responsible). If this is not the case, then the permission of his guardian should be sought, within the limits set by Shari`ah.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is it permissible to seek medication?

The governing principle is that it is allowed to seek medication because of what has been narrated to this effect in the Quran and Sunnah, i.e., the words and deeds of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and because it involves saving lives, which is one of the overall aims of Shari`ah.

The rulings governing the issue of seeking medication differ according to the circumstances and

people involved:

1. Seeking medication is obligatory in cases where not giving medication could cause death, disability or the loss of a limb, or where the sickness is bound to spread if not treated, as in contagious diseases.
2. It is encouraged in cases where not giving medication may weaken a person physically, and it is not as bad as the cases mentioned above.
3. It is allowed in cases which are not covered in the two preceding categories.
4. It is discouraged in cases where the treatment could lead to complications that are worse than the original complaint.

Treatment of cases where recovery is hopeless

- The Muslim believes that disease and cure are matters that are under the control of Allah, may He be glorified. Treatment and medication are ways of utilizing the laws of cause and effect that Allah has incorporated into the running of the universe. It is not permitted to despair of the mercy of Allah – there should always be the hope of healing by the permission of Allah. The doctors and families should try to raise the morale of those who are sick and continue their efforts to relieve the mental and physical suffering of the patient regardless of whether a cure is expected or not.
- Deeming a situation to be hopeless is based only on doctors' opinions, the state of medical science in any given time or place, and the circumstances of the patient himself.

Should we seek the patient's permission to give him medication?

- Seeking the patient's permission depends on whether he is qualified to give it (i.e., he should be of sound mind, mature, and responsible). If this is not the case, then the permission of his guardian should be sought, within the limits set by Shari`ah which requires the guardian to take care of a person's interests and protect him from harm. No attention should be paid to the guardian's refusal to give permission if this is obviously going to harm the person. In this case, guardianship has to be transferred to another guardian, or to the Muslim leader.

- The Muslim leader has the right to force medication in certain situations, such as a case of contagious disease, or the giving of vaccines or when taking preventive measures to control the spread of diseases.
- In an emergency where lives are at stake, treatment can be administered without waiting for permission or consent.
- When carrying out medical research, there must be total agreement on the part of suitably qualified subjects, with no element of compulsion (such as using prisoners for research) or financial compulsion (such as using the poor), and no harm must result from this research. It is not permitted to carry out medical research on people who are unable to give their consent, even if their guardians agree to it.