

Fulfilling servitude to God: A resolution to decision-making challenges of respect for patient Autonomy and paternalism approaches

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ABSTRACT

Physicians have often made the necessary decisions for patient treatment as compassionate and knowledgeable caregivers for their patients. However, humanistic thinking and excessive paternalism in medicine caused the social demands and medical ethics to move towards respecting the patient's autonomy. Regarding the concepts of respect for the patient's autonomy and the doctor's paternalism, various challenges have been raised and various articles have been published. This article is a conceptual study that briefly explains these concepts and then provides an alternative solution based on the religious concept of servitude to achieve God's satisfaction and get closer to God.

Keywords: Patient Autonomy, Medical Paternalism, Servitude to God, Healthcare System

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Introduction

For a long time, Physicians have been regarded as compassionate and benevolent fathers to their patients. Often they make decisions that they believe are the best choices for their patients (1). Both from the perspective of society and the patient's point of view, the patients were not as benevolent as the doctors and did not have the

necessary information. Therefore, patients were deprived of the right to independence in treatment decisions and this right was given to doctors. This old and common process in the doctor-patient relationship is called paternalism, which is condemned today (2). In modern medical ethics, respect for patient autonomy has replaced medical paternalism (3). The patient autonomy is one of the four principles of medical



ethics. Respect for patient autonomy is an important concept in the medical community, especially in countries where liberal thinking (liberalism) or humanistic thinking (humanism) prevails.

It can be said that the philosophical theory of respecting the patient's autonomy has also led to other concepts in treatment decisions, concepts such as compassionate death or easy death (euthanasia) (4, 5), Advance Directive (AD) (6), the right to abortion (7), the order not to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (Do-Not-Resuscitate, DNR) (8) or Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNAR) and so on (9).

Many articles have defended the doctor's paternalism or respect for the patient's autonomy (10, 1, 2). The aim of this article is to compare two theories about respect for patient autonomy and paternalism in health system decision-making. We will discuss the benefits and disadvantages of each theory based on the medical ethics literature. Finally, by providing documentation of the God's absolute worship concept in the Holy Quran, as a revelation text without historical distortion, we can present a solution to solve the challenges in medical practices.

Materials and Methods

This research is a conceptual study that compares paternalism and respect to autonomy concepts. We debated the advantages and disadvantages of both of them and then presented an Islamic concept using the Quran's teachings.

We searched English documents in PubMed, Google Scholar, SCOPUS, and Science Direct websites.

We used the sensitive keywords: “patient autonomy advantage”, “paternalism advantage”, “patient autonomy disadvantage”, “paternalism disadvantage”, “medical paternalism”, and “respect for patient autonomy

Relevant articles were included in the study and the rest were excluded:

Inclusion criteria: English language, full text, without time limitation.

Exclusion criteria: clinical trials, duplication, other languages than English, only abstract, grey literature (news, dissertations, preprints...).

Results

Physician paternalism

The word paternalism comes from the Latin word *pater*, which in English is equivalent to the word father. Paternalism refers to a patriarchal culture where the power of decision-making rests with the father of the family and participation of other family members is diminished or nonexistent (11).

In the healthcare system, physician paternalism expresses a type of relationship between patients and healthcare professionals since patients are not knowledgeable on the same level as healthcare and medical professionals and do not have sufficient information (12). Several political writers, sociologists, and philosophers focused on such relationships in their work. Doctors may consider themselves benefactors of patients and in practice do not provide information to patients in order to use their participation in diagnostic or treatment decisions.

Paternalism advantages

It is accepted that the best decisions are made by medical experts and specialists (13). To the extent that Brett considers the use of selective paternalism obligatory in some cases (14). In

many cases, patients may not be aware of their disease, its severity, treatment options, and the duration of each treatment option, which can be distressing and cause anxiety. Also, the use of paternalism can be a good policy for vulnerable people, young children, people with mental illnesses, and dementia, and people who are at risk of suicide (15). Sometimes the patient refuses life-saving treatments due to severe pain, in which case paternalism can be useful (16). On the other hand, patients expect their doctors to make the best decisions for them, and in some parts of the world, patients still expect their doctors to be paternalistic (17).

Paternalism disadvantages

The big disadvantage of paternalism is that the patient's preferences and values are ignored, and perhaps it can be said that paternalism is considered a form of cruelty and disrespect to the patient. Such damage can be seen in special cases such as the presence of severe pain at the end of the life of patients who believe that the patient wishes should be respected, even if their request is long-term and deep sedation (16).

Respect for patient's autonomy

Respecting the patient's autonomy is a philosophical concept whose main roots were in Kant's humanistic thinking (18) in the form of human independence, and later entered medicine and the doctor-patient relationship.

Public outrage from the scandals of the Nazi medical experiments, the Tuskegee studies on syphilis, and similar cases reinforced respect for patient autonomy (19).

Although the concept of respecting the patient's right to autonomy, based on David Ross' theory of moral duty (20), seems trivial, it had both supporters and opponents from different aspects.

Autonomy advantages

Respect for autonomy makes a person feel independent, and as a result, he has life satisfaction, happiness, and a positive view of his future life, and he is safe from depression and less prone to negative critical thoughts (21).

Many patients want to participate in their treatment process and have their wishes taken into account in decisions. These people want to know the type of their disease, to know if their disease is treatable or not, and if it is treatable, to have the best diagnostic and treatment methods, and to know the cost of each treatment. Even some supporters have considered this right mandatory for patients (22). They believe that in order to prevent doctors from dominating patients, and probably because of skepticism towards extreme paternalistic profiteering, patients should have the power to participate in decisions related to their treatment. In addition, its proponents believed that patient participation can be justified even using therapeutic reasoning because decisions based on patient autonomy can be wiser and patients should take responsibility for making decisions in their treatment process (23).

Socially and cognitively, patients benefit from such decisions and experience positive effects on their immune system by reducing stress and using faster and safer treatment. Moreover, these advocates consider it the moral duty of patients to participate in the decision-making process of treatments, because being human depends on the ability to reason and make moral judgments.

By enforcing society's view of autonomy, patients can understand their capacities for informed reasoning, and there should be a matching of abilities between patients and doctors (24). so that doctors are not the most powerful and patients the most powerless in

decision-making. In this case, the doctor and the patient can jointly decide on the gentle death method with the least pain and suffering.

If patients believe that doctors will make the best treatment decisions for them like a benevolent and responsible father, they will fully trust them and the treatment process will proceed smoothly. It can be said that the benevolence of doctors is not compatible with informing patients and involving them in the treatment decision-making process unless doctors have a reasonable argument that providing such information to patients will seriously harm them (25).

From the concept of respect for autonomy, other concepts have emerged in medicine that have been discussed in the fields of philosophy and medical ethics.

Autonomy disadvantage

In some cases, the patients are suffering from a difficult disease, the use of autonomy has a disadvantage, they cannot make their own decisions, and doctors should make decisions for them like a caring father or mother (26).

Euthanasia

To accept respect for patient autonomy, compassionate death or euthanasia was defined as a dignified and easy death assisted by physicians (27, 28).

Regarding the different types of death (active, passive, voluntary, forced), the voluntary type at the patient's request is an example of respect for the patient's autonomy.

Advance Directive (AD)

The concept of AD is also based on the principle of respect for patient autonomy, where patients have the right to reserve their choice in advance for the future when they will lose their decision-

making capacity. Such choice can be considered in two ways:

The first is for the patient to choose a healthcare attorney who will make decisions based on the patient's preferences and wishes in the event of incapacity (29). The second is that patients, while they still have decision-making capacity, prepare a document called an AD or advance care directive and present it to healthcare workers so that the treatment team can use it to preserve such capacity after they lose such capacity. The patient's independence should be used in such circumstances (30).

The right to abortion

Various views on the dignity and personhood of the fetus were discussed, as well as the right of the mother to have an abortion.

According to the autonomy-based view, the mother has the right to decide on abortion (31). This view has been widely criticized and defended. Proponents believe that the fetus grows in the mother's body and is a part of her body, so respecting the mother's independence requires that she decide to abort the fetus herself. Abortion may be justified on some moral grounds (31). However, other moral schools have several reasons for opposing abortion.

From a humanist point of view, man is the owner of soul and essence and has the right to decide about the wholeness of his being.

Humanists who both recognize the identity of the fetus and recognize the "right to die" (32), as a human right, are forced to accept the right to abortion.

When the mother herself can decide whether to live or not, then surely she is also responsible for deciding the life of her fetus.

Discussion

In order to solve the above-mentioned challenges from the perspective of Islam, it is necessary to carefully examine the various dimensions of human existence. In our opinion, from the perspective of Islam, both of these theories have advantages and disadvantages and absolutely cannot be the basis for decision-making in the health system. We introduce decision-making based on absolute obedience to God's commands as an alternative theory.

According to Islamic teachings, God is the creator and owner of all universes. All beings are His creatures to serve him. Man is His best creation, who had dignity and was superior to other creatures and had a special honor.

“We honored the children of Adam (Holy Quran, Esra,70) we created man with the best stature (Holy Quran, Tin,4). But He shaped him to fit and breathed into him His spirit (Holy Quran, Sad,72). And he gave you hearing and sight as well as feeling and understanding” (Holy Quran, Nahl,78). God has given man the ability to think and reason and to perform actions .He gave human beings hearing and sight as well as intelligence and affection.

God made human beings His superior creation and made all the worlds and creatures subservient to him and praised himself for His creation; “We closed the sperm as a clot of blood, then that clot turns into a mass (embryo), from that mass of bone was created and then we covered the bones with meat. Then we created another creature from it. So praise be to God, the best of creation (Holy Quran, Momenoon,12-14)

But man is not allowed to harm other creatures and nature with such authority (33).

Man, with all his God-given advantages and privileges, is still His creation, which is characterized by weakness, defects, and

limitations. Since man does not control all aspects of his existence and is not aware of it, he does not have the necessary knowledge and ability to manage such aspects. Therefore, with these limitations, relying only on human abilities, they cannot make the best possible decision according to their soul and body.

In humanist thinking, rational man is considered as the end of decisions (34), not that it is defined based on human purposefulness as means and profit and loss. In this view, only humans will determine the rightness or wrongness of their actions. Hence, the result of respect for free will or independence, authority, or the power of choice, in line with respect for the doctrine that "man is the end "is both fully accepted and propagated.

In Islam, man, as God's superior creation, must serve God. However, despite their authority, they are not allowed to make any arbitrary decisions about harming other creatures.

According to the Quran, man was created to worship God and he must be accountable to God; “

I created jinn and humans only to worship me and serve me”. (Holy Quran, Zariat,56) “Everyone is responsible for what he gets” (Holy Quran, Moddaser,38). Therefore, human decisions and choices must be compatible with the will and plan of God, the wise and all-knowing, and should not contradict God's service. In order to achieve such a view in life, a person should worship God and make a decision to please God. In the monotheistic view, God is the embodiment of all goodness and presents a unique model of morality for humans. According to Islamic logic and traditions, a person should follow "good deeds to get closer to God". The more people try to cultivate moral virtues in their actions, the more they fulfill the purpose of God's creation.

Such a view should govern all aspects of human life.

Since both the doctor and the patient seek to serve God, when deciding on treatment options and choosing the best treatment solution, the highest priority in decision-making is to reach divine satisfaction and evolve in the path of divine worship. According to such a view, neither respect for patient autonomy nor paternalism alone is adequate for appropriate decision-making. The doctor must evaluate the complete physical, mental, and social conditions of the patient and provide maximum benefit to the patient by respecting the patient's autonomy. Man is an eternal being and continues his eternal life after earthly death, therefore, in making decisions for patients, all aspects of life and material and spiritual benefits should be considered. Sometimes material and spiritual interests conflict with each other and the acquisition of one overshadows the other. In such a situation, the type of prioritization for benefit should be defined based on divine principles. Living with pain may be too difficult for many patients, and their apparent benefit may be to end their lives. However, in order to serve God, the patient can accept this suffering for spiritual upliftment and ascension to the non-physical levels of his existence. However, doctors are obliged to reduce the pain and suffering of patients as much as possible.

Patients may ask doctors to help them end their lives sooner or not start treatment to hasten their death. However, in this situation, both doctors and patients, as well as companions and relatives of the patient, should comprehensively evaluate the benefits and interests of the patients, and the desire of the patients cannot be the only criterion in decision-making.

In monotheistic and God-centered views, especially in Islamic teachings, abortion is

considered abhorrent and abortion is not allowed except in special cases. The most important reason for religious teachings opposing abortion is respect for the fetus as a potential human being. Recognizing the patient's multifaceted and comprehensive interest is closely related to a person's view of his world and philosophy of life. What is the purpose of man from creation and his worldly life and did God have a special purpose for man's creation? Is there a difference between being and not being human on earth, and if so, what is it? The answers to these questions have a profound effect on the intellectual foundation of human beings in the field of the value of life and saving the patient's life. The answer to these questions based on the monotheistic point of view emphasizes that human life is not in vain and is in line with the realization of an important divine goal. Considering the value of life and its sanctity, a person cannot decide to end his life and refuse necessary treatment despite the divine order to save life; "Neither kill nor destroy yourselves"(Holy Quran, Baghareh,195) And yet, in liberal thinking, refusing treatment is considered a right for every person (35) and in modern medical ethics, choosing to refuse the required treatment is considered to respect the patient's autonomy and protect the patient's rights (36).

In Islam, man is the most valuable creature, and in Islamic orders, the greatest effort is to insist on saving human life. Therefore, a person cannot have a choice in front of saving his life or others, and if the treatments can save his life or heal the body, patients should accept such treatments. In the relationship between the Lord and the servant, God is the ruler of the universe and knows the good and the bad and the profit and loss of the sick. But man, as God's creation, has weakness, incapacity, and ignorance towards his Lord. Servants cannot realize their interests like

their Lord and choose the best choice for themselves and make it come true. Therefore, the best decision should put patients on the path of servitude and please their Lord. In Shia jurisprudence, a person must seek treatment and provide for his health, and refusing treatment is forbidden. Although there should be no legal or physical coercion to accept treatment, patients cannot refuse treatment.

Conclusion

Unconditional promotion of respect for patient autonomy and doctor's patriarchy is a challenging and irrational issue. As a creature that is highly respected and bowed by other creatures and God in creation, in order to achieve the supreme goal of creation, man should manage his life in such a way that his dignity is not damaged. Such management should be through following the divine orders that are expressed in religions and spiritual orders. Absolute respect for the autonomy of the patient or the patriarchy of the doctor cannot be the best solution for not violating such dignity. Humans should use their authority to reach God's pleasure and get closer to His holy essence, and use this authority to maximize multifaceted and comprehensive benefits. However, this authority should not be against God's will. Therefore, neither respect for patient authority nor physician patriarchy can be unconditionally accepted in the health care system to solve decision-making challenges. The doctor and the patient should work together to find a solution in line with God's pleasure and also in the path of God's worship and closeness to God.

In this article, we tried to express the deep concepts of the Qur'an in simple language, but the audience's lack of understanding of the concepts of the Holy Qur'an and converting its

concepts into simple expressions was considered a limitation for the authors.

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