

Teamwork in Islam: A model for the Health Professions

¹Aliyu AD.

¹Newgate College of Health Technology, Minna, Nigeria.

Corresponding author:

Aliyu AD., Newgate College of Health Technology, Minna, Nigeria. Emails:

alhdanjumaaliyu@yahoo.com or danlanle@gmail.com

Introduction

The first Muslim team on earth is that of Adam and Hawwau (Eve). Such team populated the earth giving rise to several communities and teams. Examples of historical teams noted in the glorious Quran were that of Moses and Aaron, the story of Dhul Qarnayn, the father-son relationship of Ibrahim and Ismail which ended up building the Ka`bah. The achievements of these historical teams emphasized the uniqueness of all believers to honor and fulfill the duty of ‘holding on to the rope of Allah together.’¹ This is stated clearly thus:

“And hold fast all together by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you) and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah’s favor on

you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love so that by His grace ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of fire and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make his signs clear to you: that ye may be guided?” (Q Al `Imran; 3:103)¹

Honoring this command of Allah (SWT) was further intensified and illustrated by the best of mankind Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him - PBUH) as he stated:²

“Faithful believers are to each other as the bricks of a wall, supporting and reinforcing each other”. So saying, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) clasped his hands by interlocking his fingers. (Al-Bukhari)

Zain cited examples of team work in Islam as the congregational prayers and the recitation of Al-Fatihah – where Muslims recite the chapter conscientiously as “we” or as one – following Allah’s Straight Path; and ‘Umrah and Hajj’ that brings together myriad of Muslims from all over the globe to refine themselves further for humanity and hereafter.³

Teamwork and the Concept of Shura

“And those who respond to their Lord and keep up prayer, and their rule is to take counsel among themselves, and who spend out of what We have given them.” (Q Ash-Shuraa; 42:38)¹

The Islamic shura (simplified as consultation) is one that creates a four dimension to teamwork.⁴ These dimensions were that of the team-leader, the team-mates, the context and the universal divination of Allah. Hence, Islamic shura identifies leadership as the “head” of teamwork and emphasizes the role of team-mates (i.e. followers) in the part selection and decision-making collaborators of the leader(s) according to universal divine creed, need of the flowing-setting(s) and understanding of the would-be team-manager’s leadership qualities. In addition,

it emphasized good followership as one that are being honored to be part of the peace model community and as change agent shunning evil and implementing rules and policies according to the revealed knowledge and the best of non-revealed knowledge. This is why the criticizing and counseling of the leader(s) is allowed in Islam even though this must be carried out in a dignified manner.⁵

In other words, Islamic shura (consultation) instills brotherhood on the foundation of the fear of Allah. Such leadership team limits frivolous resignation and making decisions based on personal interest. This is why shura is often referred to as the main consultative team because of its constituent members comprising of learned men and representatives of all walks of life from the community. The shura is well documented in the practice of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and comprised of his (PBUH) closest companions and sometimes included his (PBUH) wives and other ‘experts’ of his (PBUH) time. The dimensions of shura team and its workings are the reasons why it is often simplified as ‘check and balance’ thus helping every citizen fall into the right place.

Best Teamwork – The roles of Ansar and Muhajireen

Zain proposed that, the Ansar and Muhajireen were probably the best teamwork documented in Islamic history.³ Both helped in building Islam at the grassroots and then beyond the Medina society. The Ansar were charitable groups that shared their homes and food to the needy and contributed to job creation for many. And the Muhajireen as dawah champions ventured into the new territory to start a new life from scratch. These two great teams were part foundation of the best generation of Islam bequeathing the tabiun generation that became hard to replicate afterwards.³

Learning from Islam to work together for health

The term ‘Multi Professional Education’ and ‘Multi Professional Health Team’ is the coming together of the health professions to work together to achieve some health care objectives.⁶ This is because “people have been known to achieve more as a result of working with others than against them.”⁷ Hence, the concept TEAM has been interpreted and understood as: **T**ogether; **E**veryone; **A**chieves; **M**ore. This critical

core of learning and in the practice of health profession was hinged on teamwork imprinted on the concept of shura shown above and its exemplification by the Ansar and Muhajireen.

As suggested by some studies^{5,8,9} and demonstrated in the lives of the Ansar and Muhajireen, a multi-professional health team must work together in order to bring out the maximum benefit to the health service users and the whole community. This emphasized that the medical teamwork is the doctor cooperating with his/her medical colleagues, and with other health workers to carry out healthcare delivery/services with the maximal best outcome as its product. Hence, the call to include teamwork principles and practices in the health profession’s training and professionals’ continuing education and practices.

Teamwork education and effectiveness

In designing education programmes^{5,8-11} to achieve a multi-professional team spirit, the following should be stressed:

1. The responsibility of the team as a group giving and sharing collective consent, responsibility, justice and

equality with personal freedom and dignity;

2. The role of each member in carrying out the team's responsibilities as not just delegation of authority but to also enjoin right and forbid wrong;
3. The extent to which roles of team members overlap employing the principle explained in point 2;
4. The processes needed for working together encompassing the principle of brotherhood and humanity; and
5. The part played by the team in the overall delivery system guided by allegiance to the team head and civil disobedience when the leader is in clear violation of the basic precept of PEACE.

For training objectives to attain team effectiveness, the following processes^{5,8-11} must be taking into consideration:

1. *Ijtihad* or Scholarly adaptability through deliberation i.e. the ability of the team as a whole to solve problems, to react flexibly to changing environmental demands and to incorporate different professions, community

representatives and patients, all of whom have essential contribution to make to the restoration of individual or community health;

2. A sense of identity based on principle of justice, equality and human dignity i.e. identity based on knowledge and insight of what the team is and what it is to do, and a personal commitment by each member to the common goals; and
3. The ability to discover, perceive accurately and interpret correctly those properties of the environment that are relevant to the purposeful functioning of the team.

Conclusion

This paper X-rayed the Islamic roots of the interchange that could make various health professionals in the health care industry to work together and hence improve the health of the public. It show-cased the principles of shura and the lives of the Ansar and Muhajireen to illustrate this. It emphasized why the medical teamwork is doctor cooperating with his/her medical colleagues, and with other health workers to carry out healthcare delivery/services. Finally, it recommended a review of the entire health

professions training curricula to prioritize teamwork.

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Conflict of interest: Nil