What we can do to help the medical practice and education in Afghanistan
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This theme is not only important, it is essential. But, first of all, we have to make sure that we are capable of accomplishing what we intended to do. Our effort is not going to be wasted. Our assistance and collaboration is needed and will be accepted by the government. When we are sure of all of that, then an appropriate and logical answer to the above posed question will be possible only when we have enough information about the medical education problems in the country.

Then, in order to find solutions to those problems, we need to devise and follow a sound and workable plan, if we wish to succeed. In this, first the problems should be recognized, and then categorized. Afterwards, we should assign priority to the most serious or urgent ones and finally we should set a timeframe for completion of the task.

Today the problems in medical practice and health conditions of the people of our country are enormous and disheartening because, not only the lack of food, poverty, infectious and parasitic disease is prevalent, but other imported and newly-recognized diseases…such as AIDS, congenital abnormalities and narcotic addiction has spread in a short time throughout the country and is increasing daily.

In the next few minutes, I would like to touch on some of the important problems concerning the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Higher Education and Medical University and at the end I will briefly state my opinion as to how these problems could be resolved in order to remedy the present dilemma for medical practice and improve the health status of our people, radical changes are needed in the plans and practices of the Ministry of Health. There also must be serious commitment and cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Higher Education as well as the University so that, first and foremost, stopping the unqualified so-called physicians and the imposters from practicing medicine. And, at the same time, we must improve and upgrade the quality of medical education and training in the university in order that the future physicians of the country become well-qualified physicians with good moral and ethical values, as well as good personalities.
Although it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health to maintain the health status of the people and to implement the proper rules and regulations of medical practice in the country and safeguarding the lives of our people, unfortunately, at this time no effective or serious effort has been made in this regard. Undoubtedly, there have been problems and shortcomings in the practice of medicine and medical education in our country in the past. Unfortunately, it is much worse now.

In Afghanistan today, medicine is still practiced in paternalistic way. Common people are mostly illiterate and tend to believe whatever they are told. People do not know their rights, let alone demand them, or for them. Today, if we exclude those few competent and knowledgeable physicians (whose aim is to improve medical practice and help the people), the health and life of our countrymen is at the mercy of three groups of unqualified, selfish and materialistic people. They have disgraced the sacred profession of medicine, which was founded on the basis of compassion, humanitarianism and benevolence. They have made medicine as a means of amassing wealth and gainful trade.

The first group: those who have a medical diploma, but lack contemporary knowledge of medicine.

The second group: those who obtained a medical diploma illegally and are not even qualified physicians.

The third group: those who have no medical diploma, no medical training and no knowledge, but still act as doctors day and night endangering the peoples’ health as well as their lives.

Today, in our country, there are no applicable medical practice laws and no accountability for malpractice. Therefore, the unqualified physicians and imposters do what they like are not considering themselves responsible or accountable to any person or authority.

The problems of the Ministry of Public Heath are many, but some of the important ones requiring urgent attention are:
1. There is no standard in medical practice in Afghanistan. There is no limit for the physician conduct on the basis of their education, training and experience.

2. People are self-serving, self-imposing, and choose any specialty for themselves without consequence.

3. Now there are many private health and operating rooms throughout the country which follow only their own rules and regulations. The practitioners’ activities are uncontrolled.

4. Sale of medicine in the pharmacies is not restricted in any way. Money can buy anything.

5. There is no “refresher course” or continuing medical education (CME) program for physician.

Problems of the Ministry of Higher Education and the University are no less than those of the Ministry of Health. We know that the education level and medical knowledge of the majority of our medical doctors in Afghanistan are below the world standards unfortunately, most of the doctors in our country are unaware of the principles of medical ethics, its rules and human rights.

It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education and the University to improve the quality and standards of medical education so that our future generations of doctors are well-qualified and competent physicians. In order to select students for the medical profession, high grades in scientific subjects should not be the only standard or condition. The candidates should be evaluated and screened as to their character, personality, disposition, and physical and mental status so that the future physicians are not only knowledgeable in medical science, but also possess a good personality, good character, and high moral and ethical behavior.

Some of the important problems of the Ministry of Higher Education and the University are:

1. The curriculum is outdated and needs revision.
2. The number of qualified teachers and instructors are very limited.
3. Medical ethics is not part of the curriculum in all medical faculties.
4. History of medicine is not a subject in the medical schools.
5. There is no medical oath for medical students at the time of graduation.

Students, in general, are unhappy and complaining about their curriculum and the methods of teaching. In believe strongly that the most important part of student’s education is teaching the principles of medical ethics or health care ethics, so that the students learn about medical art, the objectives and principles of medicine.

Here, I quote one of the principles of medicine: “A physician dedicates his life to the practice of medicine and well-being of his patients and performs his duty with a high level of morality and knowledge. It is this education, good character, high moral and ethical values of the physician that gives him a special status in the society and earns him respect and trust of the patient and the community”.

Today, in the West, after the passage of more than 2000 years and devaluation of the historical Hippocratic Oath by repeated amendments, once again, medical professionalism is being taught in medical schools.

Now, about what we can do:

First, medical assistance to our people, whether from individuals or groups, is still very helpful and will benefit a few. However, this will not solve the problem of the people and the country as a whole. The only way that medical assistance to patients and hospitals, consultation, and assistance to medical schools really assists the country and our people is with the cooperation and consultation of different related government offices or authorities.

Therefore, it is necessary for AMPAA to be in direct contact with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Higher Education, and the University, and especially with the advisory minister of health to the president.

It is, of course, important to inform them of AMPAA’s readiness to help in planning and implementing health programs and projects of the Ministry of Health. It is also important to assure the authorities in the University that we are ready to help in revising the curriculum and in taking part in teaching in the medical schools.
And finally, that we are ready to share the responsibility in treating patients in the clinics and hospitals following a set program.