



HISTORY, POLITICS, PRIMARY SOURCE STUDIES

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BIMARISTANS: UNIQUE INSTITUTIONS IN THE PREVENTION OF STIGMATIZATION

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Abstract

The history of science reveals that the Bimaristan represented a truly groundbreaking and innovative approach to healthcare during its time. It skillfully merged the essential concepts of compassion and medical expertise, creating a model that was not only effective but also revolutionary in its understanding of patient care. This institution set a new standard for how healthcare could be delivered, emphasizing the importance of treating patients with kindness while also applying advanced medical knowledge.

Its legacy continues to exert a profound influence on contemporary healthcare systems, highlighting the critical importance of specialized medical institutions that cater to the diverse needs of patients. By understanding the historical significance of Bimaristans, we gain

valuable insight into the evolution of medical practices over the centuries, as well as the societal values that have shaped our understanding of health and wellness across various cultures.

This article focuses particularly on Bimaristans, exploring their unique role as institutions dedicated to the prevention of stigmatization in healthcare settings.

The concept of Bimaristan not only highlights the advancements in medical knowledge during that era but also reflects the cultural and social values surrounding health and healing. This historical legacy continues to influence modern healthcare practices and reminds us of the importance of compassion and innovation in the treatment of patients.

Keywords: history of science, Bimaristan, historical legacy, societal values, prevention of stigmatization.

Introduction

The term "Bimaristan" has its origins deeply rooted in the Persian language, specifically arising from the combination of two significant words: "bīmār" (بیمار), which translates to "sick" or "ill," and "stān" (ستان), meaning "place." Therefore, when these two components are combined, "Bimaristan" literally translates to "a place for the sick." This concept not only reflects a linguistic understanding but also embodies a vital aspect of historical Persian and Islamic culture, where the care and treatment of the ill were held in high regard and viewed as a moral obligation. The establishment of such facilities underscores the profound emphasis placed on compassion and the well-being of individuals who were in desperate need of medical attention during that significant period, particularly throughout the Middle Ages.

Bimaristans functioned as hospitals or infirmaries within medieval Islamic society, playing an essential role in the advancement of medical care and practices. These institutions were far more than mere places for the treatment of various diseases; they also served as important centers for medical education and research. Bimaristans were equipped with a diverse array of facilities meticulously designed to cater to the comprehensive needs of patients. These institutions included spacious wards specifically intended for recovery, extensive libraries filled with invaluable medical texts and resources, and even well-stocked pharmacies that provided necessary medications for various ailments. This multifaceted approach not only significantly enhanced the quality of care provided to individuals but also fostered an enriching environment of learning and innovation. Such an atmosphere contributed immensely to the expansion of medical knowledge during that era.

Notably, Bimaristans were often staffed by highly skilled physicians who adhered to rigorous training standards and practices. Many of these doctors were pioneers in their respective fields, making substantial contributions to advancements in medicine. They employed methods that emphasized careful observation and hands-on experience, effectively laying the groundwork for what we now recognize as modern medical practices.

Methods

the application of Artificial Intelligence in the current generation of SLR.

Discussion

The first known Bimaristan was established in the 9th century in Baghdad, during the illustrious period of the Abbasid Caliphate, which was marked by significant cultural and intellectual flourishing. Over time, this innovative model of healthcare spread across the vast

Islamic world, influencing the establishment of similar institutions in regions like Persia, North Africa, and even parts of Europe.

Bimaristans, which are historically significant institutions, played an essential and transformative role in the development of healthcare, particularly in the realm of mental health. These remarkable facilities originated in the medieval Islamic world and were specifically established to treat a wide range of ailments, including various mental illnesses. In contrast to the often stigmatized and harsh treatment of mental health that we observe today, bimaristans offered a much more humane and compassionate approach to care.

These institutions were designed not merely as hospitals for the sick, but rather as comprehensive centers of learning, healing, and care. They provided a nurturing and supportive environment where individuals suffering from mental health conditions could receive not only medical attention but also rehabilitation and vital social support. The architecture of bimaristans was thoughtfully designed, often incorporating beautiful gardens and tranquil spaces that promoted a serene atmosphere, which was conducive to the healing process.

One of the most remarkable and noteworthy aspects of bimaristans was their strong emphasis on the dignity and respect of patients. Medical professionals, including skilled physicians and insightful philosophers, worked collaboratively to understand and effectively treat mental health issues. They employed a holistic approach that took into account both physical and psychological factors, recognizing the complex interplay between the mind and body. This progressive practice was revolutionary for its time and laid the crucial groundwork for what we now consider modern psychiatric care, influencing how mental health is perceived and treated in contemporary society.

The principles that were pioneered by the Bimaristans did not simply fade away into obscurity; instead, they were thoughtfully absorbed and adapted over time, continuing to resonate profoundly within the realms of modern medical practice and philosophical thought.

The introduction of the Bimaristan marked a significant turning point, as it established the concept of a centralized and permanent institution that was wholly dedicated to the healing of the sick. This innovative idea can be traced directly to the origins of what we now recognize as the modern hospital. The understanding that a city requires a dedicated facility equipped with specialized wards - such as those for medical care, surgical procedures, and psychiatric treatment - along with pharmacies, libraries, and educational resources, is a legacy that can be traced back to pioneering institutions like the 'Audi Hospital in Baghdad and the Mansuri Hospital in Cairo.

The approach adopted by the Bimaristan was inherently holistic in nature. They did not merely treat the physical ailments of the body; they also took into account the mind and spirit, recognizing the intricate connections that exist among them. This comprehensive perspective was clearly reflected in their therapeutic practices, which included the use of music, art, and the creation of soothing environments, such as gardens and fountains. These elements were thoughtfully incorporated into the healing process, particularly for patients struggling with mental health issues.

One of the most remarkable and powerful aspects of the Bimaristan's enduring legacy is their commitment to compassionate care that actively worked against the stigmatization of mental illness. By integrating individuals with mental health challenges into general hospitals and treating them with the same level of medical professionalism and respect afforded to those with physical ailments, these institutions played a crucial role in reshaping societal perceptions. They

framed mental illness as a legitimate medical condition, rather than a moral failing or a sign of demonic possession, thereby fostering a more compassionate and understanding approach to mental health care.

Results

Key Features of Bimaristans that Prevented Stigmatization

The distinctive and significant role that bimaristans played in preventing stigmatization can be attributed to a variety of core principles and practices. These foundational elements, as highlighted in the search results, illustrate how bimaristans effectively fostered an environment of acceptance and understanding.

The bimaristans, which were the hospitals of the medieval Islamic world, represented far more than just basic medical facilities; they stood as a remarkable advancement in the realm of healthcare, deeply rooted in a rich tapestry of ethical and religious principles. The inception of these institutions was driven by a profound imperative to provide care for all individuals, regardless of their social status, wealth, or personal background. This inclusive approach was significantly influenced by Islamic teachings that emphasize the values of charity, compassion, and the inherent sanctity of human life.

Charitable endowments, known as waqf, played an essential role in both the establishment and the ongoing sustainability of these vital healthcare institutions. Waqf is an Islamic philanthropic practice in which individuals donate assets or property for the public good, often dedicating the proceeds to support various initiatives, including those related to religion, education, and healthcare. This financial model not only ensured a consistent and reliable stream of resources for the bimaristans but also reflected a broader communal responsibility towards the health and well-being of society as a whole.

The implications of this innovative system were nothing short of profound. First and foremost, it democratized access to medical

care, allowing even the most impoverished members of society to receive the treatment they needed. This was a radical departure from the contemporary practices observed in many parts of the world at that time, where healthcare was frequently viewed as a privilege that was reserved solely for the affluent and well-connected. In the bimaristans, patients were treated without regard to their financial condition, fostering a powerful sense of unity and social responsibility among the populace.

These institutions evolved into centers of medical education and research, attracting scholars and practitioners who were dedicated to contributing to the advancement of medical knowledge. The bimaristans were equipped with libraries, lecture halls, and laboratories, which enabled the training of future physicians and facilitated the dissemination of groundbreaking medical innovations. This holistic approach not only enhanced the quality of care provided but also laid the groundwork for future developments in the field of medicine.

Bimaristans, the historical institutions for the care of the sick, were remarkable for their inclusive policies. They provided medical services to all individuals, irrespective of race, religion, citizenship, or gender. This principle of non-discrimination was not merely a guideline; it was enshrined in the waqf documents that governed these institutions.

Waqf, an Islamic endowment, outlined the terms of operation for the bimaristans. These documents explicitly mandated that no patient would be turned away based on their background or beliefs.

Patients from diverse backgrounds could seek treatment without fear of bias. Physicians and caregivers in these facilities were often trained in various medical traditions, contributing to a rich exchange of knowledge. This integration facilitated advancements in medical practices and helped establish a more holistic approach to healthcare.

The structure of bimaristans was thoughtfully designed to accommodate a diverse range of ailments and medical conditions. These institutions were equipped with advanced medical facilities that were considered cutting-edge for their time, including well-stocked pharmacies, specialized surgical rooms, and dedicated spaces for patient recovery and rehabilitation. Notably, many bimaristans also placed a strong emphasis on the importance of medical education, serving not only as treatment centers but also as vital training grounds for aspiring physicians and medical scholars. This focus on education played a crucial role in the development of a knowledgeable healthcare workforce that was deeply committed to improving public health outcomes.

Furthermore, the absence of financial barriers in bimaristans demonstrated a profound understanding of the ethical imperatives that underpin healthcare. This approach fostered a strong sense of community and compassion, as medical professionals and caregivers were motivated by altruism and a genuine desire to help others, rather than by the pursuit of profit. This model underscores the historical precedence of equitable healthcare access, which remains highly relevant in contemporary discussions about health equity and justice.

Bimaristans were not merely institutions of healing; they were also centers of learning and compassion. Their unwavering commitment to providing free healthcare laid a solid foundation for future medical practices and highlighted the critical importance of accessibility in health services. The enduring legacy of bimaristans continues to influence modern healthcare systems today, serving as a powerful reminder of the lasting value of compassion and community-focused care in the pursuit of health and well-being for all.

Patients were not hurried out of the hospital. The waqf documents clearly mandated that hospitals must keep all patients until they were fully recovered and ready to return home. This policy effectively

alleviated the anxiety that often accompanies the prospect of being discharged while still feeling vulnerable and unwell, showcasing a profound form of institutional compassion that prioritized patient well-being.

This is where the role of bimaristans in preventing the stigmatization of mental illness becomes particularly striking and noteworthy. A millennium before the humane treatment of individuals suffering from mental health issues became a common and accepted practice in Europe, these remarkable institutions were true pioneers in the field of mental health care. They laid the essential groundwork for a more compassionate and understanding approach to mental health treatment, emphasizing the critical importance of treating individuals with dignity, respect, and empathy. By doing so, they not only addressed the medical needs of their patients but also fostered an environment that encouraged acceptance and support for those grappling with mental health challenges.

Rather than confining individuals with mental illnesses to isolated institutions, they were instead treated in specialized wards located within general hospitals. This approach to integration, which emphasized a medical rather than a punitive environment, served as a powerful measure against the stigma often associated with mental health issues. By framing mental illness as a medical condition similar to any other physical ailment, society began to foster a more compassionate understanding of these challenges.

The overall approach to mental health care was holistic, taking into account not just the body, but also the mind and spirit. This comprehensive perspective was reflected in the design and atmosphere of the hospitals themselves. y ensuring an abundance of natural light, fresh air, and running water. Additionally, the inclusion of music ai-

med to comfort and uplift patients, creating a nurturing environment conducive to healing. compassionate

The compassionate core that was delivered in these various settings was firmly supported by the advanced theoretical work of notable physician-philosophers, including Al-Razi, who is also widely recognized by the name Rhazes, and Ibn Sina, more commonly known as Avicenna.

These encyclopedists laid down the groundwork for a more nuanced and humane approach to medicine, moving beyond mere symptom management to embrace a holistic understanding of health and well-being. Their extensive writings, often compiled and disseminated within the very walls of the bimaristans, provided the theoretical scaffolding upon which practical care was built.

Al-Razi emphasized the importance of clinical observation and empirical evidence. He advocated for a rational approach to diagnosis and treatment, firmly believing that understanding the underlying causes of disease was paramount. His detailed case histories and meticulous descriptions of various ailments served as invaluable learning tools for aspiring physicians, fostering a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement that directly counteracted the fear and ignorance often associated with illness.

Ibn Sina foundations with his monumental *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine). This comprehensive encyclopedia became a cornerstone of medical education for centuries, not only in the Islamic world but also in Europe. The Canon detailed everything from anatomy and physiology to pharmacology and therapeutics, offering a systematic and accessible framework for understanding the human body and its ailments. Crucially, Ibn Sina's work also touched upon the psychological aspects of healing, recognizing the profound impact of a patient's mental state on their recovery. This emphasis on the

interconnectedness of mind and body further contributed to a less stigmatizing approach to care, as he articulated that suffering was not solely a physical burden. The physical space of a bimaristan was thoughtfully designed to foster an atmosphere of healing and dignity, which played a crucial role in directly combating the stigma often associated with illness.

Hospitals were equipped with clean water sources, ensuring that patients were regularly bathed, and they provided fresh, clean bedding to enhance comfort and promote health.

Features such as soothing fountains, serene courtyards adorned with trees, and even the presence of musicians were incorporated not merely as luxuries but as essential components of the therapeutic process. These elements were intentionally designed to contribute to the overall well-being of the patient, creating a nurturing environment conducive to recovery.

This thoughtful and considerate approach effectively conveyed a powerful and significant message: patients were not merely cases to be treated, but rather valued individuals who deserved comfort, compassionate care, and respect throughout every stage of their healing process. This perspective emphasized the importance of treating each patient with dignity and recognizing their unique needs and experiences.

In terms of governance, Bimaristans functioned as secular institutions, which meant they were managed independently of religious authorities. These facilities were overseen by trained medical professionals who were wholly dedicated to providing high-quality healthcare, rather than being under the supervision of clerics or religious figures. This independence allowed for a more focused and effective approach to patient care.

The secular nature of medical practice within these institutions ensured that treatment decisions were made based on sound medical criteria, rather than being swayed by moral or religious considerations. This approach fostered an environment where medical professionals could prioritize patient welfare and adhere to the best practices in healthcare.

The institutions employed salaried physicians and pharmacists, ensuring that medical expertise was readily available to all patients. Additionally, they maintained separate wards that were staffed by nurses of the same sex, which helped create a comfortable and respectful environment for patients. This attention to detail in staffing contributed to a more personalized and sensitive approach to patient care.

Bimaristan took a significant and transformative step forward by making physician licensure a mandatory requirement for all medical practitioners. This important change meant that doctors were required to successfully pass a rigorous and comprehensive examination before they could practice medicine. By implementing this requirement, Bimaristan established a professional standard that not only elevated the status and credibility of medical practitioners but also significantly enhanced the overall quality of care provided to patients under their supervision. This newly instituted system ensured that only qualified and competent individuals could offer medical services, thereby effectively protecting patient safety and well-being. Ultimately, this initiative contributed to a more reliable and trustworthy healthcare environment, benefiting both practitioners and those seeking medical assistance.

Bimaristans were pioneers in the practice of keeping meticulous written records of patients and their medical treatments. This systematic approach formalized patient care and contributed to a more scientific understanding of illness, moving away from the superstiti-

ous beliefs that had previously dominated medical thought. By documenting treatments and outcomes, these institutions laid the groundwork for future advancements in medical science.

Moreover, Bimaristans played a crucial role in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. By providing dedicated spaces specifically for the treatment and care of individuals with mental health issues, they helped normalize discussions surrounding mental health and fostered an environment of acceptance and understanding. Patients were not merely viewed as individuals suffering from disorders; instead, they were treated with empathy and compassion, recognizing their humanity and the complexities of their experiences. This shift in perspective was vital in promoting mental health awareness and improving the overall quality of care provided to those in need.

Conclusion

In contemporary society, legacy of bimaristans can be clearly observed in the ongoing and vital efforts to destigmatize mental health issues. These historical institutions serve as a powerful reminder of the critical importance of empathy and understanding within the realm of healthcare. As we navigate the complexities of mental health challenges today, the foundational principles established by bimaristans continue to hold significant relevance. Promoting awareness and fostering supportive environments are not merely beneficial but essential steps in the ongoing battle against stigma and in the quest to improve mental health care for all individuals, regardless of their circumstances.

Bimaristans were not just hospitals; they were pioneering centers of medical education and research that laid the groundwork for many practices we take for granted today. They were the first institutions to implement several groundbreaking measures, including the

requirement for physicians to pass rigorous examinations and obtain licenses before they could practice medicine. This was a revolutionary step toward ensuring that only qualified individuals could provide medical care. Additionally, bimaristans maintained formal written patient records, which were crucial for both the study of diseases and the continuity of treatment for patients.

Moreover, these institutions employed salaried staff, including physicians, pharmacists, and nurses, thereby creating a professional medical workforce that was dedicated to patient care. This was a significant advancement in the organization of healthcare services. Bimaristans also played a pivotal role in separating the roles of physician and pharmacist, which led to the development of specialized apothecaries and laid the groundwork for the science of pharmacy as we know it today.

The principles that were first systematically implemented in the bimaristans have given rise to modern constructs such as medical licensing boards, hospital accreditation, and continuing medical education. These frameworks form the entire edifice of contemporary medical professionalism. Furthermore, the doctor-patient relationship, which is now governed by ethical codes and professional standards, finds a strong historical precedent in the practices established within these remarkable institutions. Thus, the legacy of bimaristans continues to influence and inspire the evolution of healthcare practices in our modern world.

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