

In the Name of Allāh, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

Praise be to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds. May prayers and peace be upon our master Muḥammad, and upon his pure and noble family and companions.

After this:

This is an explanation of a fatwa issued by Shaykh ‘Abdullāh al-Harari in 2002 regarding who is permitted to practice medicine and treat people. The fatwa was printed and published with the seal of the Shaykh, may Allāh have mercy upon him.

The Fatwa of Imam al-Harari

Imam al-Harari said:

“The scholars unanimously agreed that it is not permissible for someone who lacks experience and is not a physician to practice medicine or treat illnesses.”

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said what it means:

“Whoever practices medicine without being known for it is liable.”

Reported by Abu Dawud in Al-Sunan.

The meaning of the hadith is that whoever does not know the properties of medicines and the conditions of diseases with their changes over time is forbidden to treat illnesses using herbs or similar remedies.

This knowledge is acquired through learning from experts who understand the natures of diseases and medicines — in terms of hotness, coldness, dryness, and wetness, as well as the changes of time that affect diseases and medicines.

Therefore, relying solely on reading medical books to treat illnesses without fulfilling these conditions is forbidden.

Persisting in such behavior is considered a major sin, because it exposes people's lives and bodies to harm. Whoever has engaged in this must repent to Allah, and whoever has taken payment for such treatment is not entitled to that payment.

Selling medicine to a patient for him to use without having the proper expertise is also forbidden, except if the medicine is sold so that it can be shown to a physician for review before use.

Many people have practiced this medicine without knowledge, which resulted in harm at their hands. Woe to the one who engages in this without sufficient expertise.

One should not say:

“I prescribe medicine based on consulting a doctor by phone without the doctor seeing the patient.”

A physician may prescribe based on the description given to him, but if he were to examine the patient directly, his diagnosis might change, and he might prescribe a different treatment.

Ibn Hajar reported that physicians said:

“Our books are deadly poisons.”

Meaning: for those who are not specialists.

Whoever relies on medical books to treat people — or to treat himself — is like someone giving poison to others or consuming poison himself, because a single medicine may benefit at one time but not another, or may benefit one person while harming another due to differences in their conditions.

This concludes the words of Imam al-Harari.

Explanation of the Fatwa

The Shaykh said:

“The scholars unanimously agreed that it is not permissible for one without expertise to practice medicine.”

Explanation

This means that it is unanimously forbidden for someone who is not a physician to practice medicine or prescribe treatments.

The Shaykh cited the hadith which means:

“Whoever practices medicine without being known for it is liable.”

Meaning: whoever practices medicine without sufficient knowledge.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ warned against claiming medical knowledge without qualification.

It was reported by al-Nasa’i, Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, and others:

“Whoever practices medicine without having known medical expertise beforehand is liable.”

This hadith contains a legal ruling intended to protect people, because the matter carries serious danger.

It shows that medicine has laws and principles that must be known, and that a person must also have experience and practical training before practicing it.

Whoever practices medicine without prior training, apprenticeship with physicians, or experience, and a patient dies as a result, he is liable, because such a person has acted recklessly in matters he did not truly understand.

This was mentioned by the physician and scholar ‘Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi in Al-Arba‘in al-Tibbiyya.

Al-Khattabi said:

There is no disagreement that if a practitioner exceeds his limits and the patient dies, he is liable.

A person who practices a science he does not know is considered to be acting beyond his competence.

Shaykh Zakariya al-Ansari stated:

Whoever practices medicine without knowing it, and harm occurs through him, is liable.

This is determined by the testimony of two just physicians who have no hostility toward him.

Ibn Hajar al-Makki also stated:

A person who does not properly diagnose disease and is not skilled in medicine but reads medical books and prescribes treatments from them has no right to any payment he receives from patients, because the payment is given under the assumption of expertise that he does not possess.

Therefore, it is forbidden for him to prescribe medicine based solely on books.

Causes of Disease According to Classical Medicine

Shaykh Shihab al-Din al-Qalyubi mentioned that diseases arise from corruption of temperament caused by imbalance in the humors, which results from:

- food
- air
- environment
- occupations
- seasons
- sleep and wakefulness
- bodily and psychological movement and rest
- retention and elimination

When the physician understands these properly, harm will not occur except by the will of Allah.

Knowledge of this is determined through:

- observable signs
- pulse examination
- urine examination

Knowledge Required for Treatment

The Shaykh explained that a physician must know:

1. The properties of medicines

Examples include medicines that are:

- dissolving
- cleansing
- opening blockages
- ripening humors
- cutting substances
- crushing hardened matter
- lubricating
- astringent
- adhesive

A person who does not know these properties may give an astringent medicine to someone suffering from intestinal colic, which could harm or even kill the patient.

2. The nature of diseases

Diseases arise from imbalance of temperament, such as:

- hotness

- coldness
- dryness
- wetness

or combinations such as:

- hot-wet
- cold-wet
- hot-dry
- cold-dry

Therefore the physician must know both the temperament of the disease and the temperament of medicines, because treatment requires using opposites.

For example:

A disease that is hot and dry (yellow bile-dominant) is treated with cold and wet medicines (phlegmatic).

Sometimes diseases combine two opposing temperaments, requiring compound treatments that balance both.

3. The effect of time and seasons

Diseases and medicines change with the four seasons:

- Spring: moderate and wet
- Summer: hot and dry

- Autumn: cold and dry
- Winter: cold and wet

A hot-dry medicine becomes stronger in summer and weaker in winter.

Thus:

- Hot diseases decrease in cold seasons and increase in hot seasons.
- Cold diseases decrease in hot seasons and increase in cold seasons.
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Warning Against Unqualified Herbal Treatment

Whoever does not fulfill these conditions is forbidden to treat patients with herbs or similar remedies.

Knowledge of this medicine must be transmitted through teachers, because its principles are established and its branches preserved.

Scholars of medicine have agreed on the causes, signs, and treatments of diseases.

Therefore relying solely on reading medical books to treat illnesses is forbidden, and persisting in this is a major sin, because it risks people's lives.

Conclusion

The conditions mentioned by Shaykh 'Abdullāh al-Harari are clear.

Anyone who claims to treat diseases but:

- does not diagnose whether the disease is hot, cold, wet, or dry
- does not examine pulse, urine, or physical signs
- does not understand the temperament of medicines

is not trustworthy with people's lives.

Even if someone happens to benefit from a remedy by coincidence, this is not the standard.

The true standard is learning the principles of medicine and practicing them properly.

Therefore my advice to anyone seeking treatment:

Do not expose yourselves to destruction.

Whoever does not diagnose the nature of the illness, does not ask about its signs, and does not understand the temperament of medicines is a danger to you.

Be cautious.