Role of Islamic teachings in prevention of chronic Hepatitis B and C
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GLOBAL EPIDEMIOLOGY
Viral Hepatitis is one of the major global problems of health. According to the WHO reports about 350 million people are carrying hepatitis B virus in their blood and 170 million suffer from hepatitis C which comprise 3% of the World population. The number of people exposed to hepatitis B at some stage of their life may be two billion. Their effects on humans range from sub-clinical infections and acute hepatitis to chronic liver diseases like cirrhosis liver and hepatocellular carcinoma. Inspite of recent advances in their detection and treatment, they continue to be a major public health problem. Both viruses cause the same type of clinico-pathological syndromes of liver disease and although fulminant hepatic failure is relatively common in HBV infections, chronic liver disease is much common in HCV infections.

SPREAD AND TRANSMISSION
There are many types of viruses causing hepatitis and these can be grossly grouped into the following:

a: Transmitted through foeco oral route (hepatitis A and E)
b: Parentally transmitted (Hepatitis B, C, D and G)

Hepatitis A and E are usually self-limiting and sometimes lead to acute serious sequellae in certain clinical situation but there are no chronic sequellae. However Hepatitis B and C virus can carry on in the body after an acute episode and in many cases become chronic with major serious clinical complications like cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. These chronic problems are the man cause of concern for health professional today. Ironically the transmission of these viruses can be prevented by understanding and thus avoidance of the factors responsible for transmission. I shall concentrate only on transmission factors of hepatitis B and C and the role of Islamic teachings in their prevention.

Research on routes of spread has revealed the percutaneous exposure as the most important mean of acquisition of Hepatitis B and C viruses. Transfusion of contaminated blood and blood products, use and sharing of contaminated needles by injecting drug users and tatooists, surgical procedures and use of non-disposable syringes by local practitioners,
have all been implicated as risk factors for transmission. Non-percutaneous routes such as perinatal\(^2\) and sexual transmission\(^7\) are more important in HBV than HCV transmission. However there is a definite risk of HCV infection by perinatal transmission and through sexual exposure\(^8\). The risk of HCV acquisition in this way is also supported by finding of HCV RNA in the semen of infected men\(^9\) and HCV RNA sequence homology in sexual partners and spouses\(^10\).

The risk factors for transmission of Hepatitis B and C depend on the social behavior and cultural norms of a society and thus vary from one country to another. In Muslim countries like Pakistan the major risk factor is repeated use of injections\(^11\) for common illnesses, while addiction and sexual transmission may be very important risk factors in USA, where sexual behavior indicates more than 10 partners in 30-34\% all age groups and more than 50 partners in 4\%\(^12\). Similarly blood transfusion is a major risk factor in developing countries because of the poor blood screening programs while it has become almost insignificant in Western countries and USA due to effective blood screening prior to transfusion.\(^13\) Addiction may not be very significant risk factor in our society while it may be very important in Western and particularly American society where overall Cocaine use at some stage of life is about 14\% and may be still higher (22\%) in the younger age group of 25-29 years and use of Marijuana 45\% at some stage of life while more than 100 times in 17\% population in the age group of 30-39 years\(^12\).

The overall factors of transmission of hepatitis B and C can be summarized as under\(^14\)
Repeated use of injections (particularly addicts)
Blood transfusion
Tattooing
Accidental exposure to contaminated blood through sharps (needles, knives etc)
Sexual transmission (specially sexual promiscuity and homosexual behavior)

These risk factors can be grouped under two main headings.

**Parental transmission.** Primarily from exposure of skin or mucosa to contaminated blood through sharps including needle stick injuries and sharps (contaminated dental / surgical instruments and barbers blades/knives etc) sharing tooth brushes, vertical transmission and tattooing etc.
**Sexual transmission** through exposure of mucosa to contaminated secretions or blood from infected individuals.

**PREVENTION**

Vaccination plays a measure role against prevention of hepatitis B but till this time vaccine could not be developed against hepatitis C, because of the structural characteristics of this virus. However adopting measures to void risk factors of transmission can be of utmost importance in the prevention of these viruses.

Muslim can play a major role in preventing the spread of hepatitis by preaching and practicing the teachings of Islam. Most of the major risk factors listed above are preventable. If we ask our public to practice Islamic principles it will have a tremendous impact on prevention of these deadly diseases. It will not only help us in this world but Allah will also reward us for this on the day of judgment. Allah loves his creation (human beings) so much that he declared in Quran:

---وَمَنْ أَخَذَ إِثْمًا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَخَذْتُ الذَّنَبَانِ جَمِيعًا---

and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.  

This Ayah does not mention of saving a Muslim only but saving a human being, be a Muslim or a Non Muslim. We should propagate our message about preventing hepatitis. If this message reaches to some people and practiced by only few of them, it will prevent hepatitis and save at least few human lives. Allah will reward us for this act of saving His creatures. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also said,

" Whosoever removes the pain and trouble of another believer, Allah will remove his trouble on the Day of Judgment."  
He also said " Whosoever makes things easier for a poor and a needy person, Allah will make things easier for him in this world as well as in the Hereafter." 

If we work with this spirit and save human life, Allah will reward us in both the Worlds.

In the following lines I will discuss the risk factors of transmission of hepatitis and the importance of Islamic principles in their prevention. This will be discussed under two main headings of parental and sexual transmission.
A:  

**Parental Transmission**

1:  

**Repeated use of injections or reuse of injections.** Even when small amount of blood from an infected individual on a used needle is injected into another person (by injecting him with that needle or syringe) hepatitis can be transmitted to him. It may be as little as one thousand part of a blood drop. Repeated use of injections obviously increases this risk. Our prophet Muhammad (SAW) has forbidden the use of excessive medications. He (SAW) said, "Leave aside medicines as long as you can manage without it." When compared to the oral medication, injectible route would delivers maximum amount of medicine to the body. One should therefore try to use oral medications as much as possible and injections should only be used in unavoidable clinical situations where oral medications cannot be given due to the seriousness or urgency of situation. This clinical practice would be in line with the guideline set in the above Hadith of the prophet where the prophet advised to use the minimum amount of medication. He has also forbidden the use of Khabith medicines

"The Holy Prophet has prohibited people from using Khabith (i.e. expired and prohibited) medicines."  

"Khabith” medicine is any substance that is used for treatment having a significant potential to harm the individual using it. It may be a toxic medicines or a contaminations e.g. from reuse of contaminated syringes and blood or blood products infected with hepatitis B or C.

2:  

**Tattooing:** One other important factor in transmission is tattooing because a contaminated needle or instrument from an infected person can transmit the disease to healthy person getting tattooed with the same needle or instrument. The prophet has forbidden tattooing and declared it “Haram.” There are many sayings (Ahadiths) of the Holly prophet in this regard and some are quoted as reference below from “Sahih Bukhari,” which is considered to be the most authentic book of the Sayings (Ahadith) of the prophet Muhammad (SAW)

**Narrated Abu Huraira**

A woman who used to practice tattooing was brought to 'Umar. 'Umar got up and said, "I beseech you by Allah, which of you heard the Prophet saying something about tattooing?" I got up and said, "O chief of the Believers! I heard something." He said, "What did you hear?" I said, "I heard the Prophet (addressing the ladies), saying, 'Do not practice tattooing and do not get yourselves tattooed.'"
Narrated 'Abdullah 22

Allah has cursed those women who practice tattooing

Narrated Abu Juhaifa 23

The Prophet forbade the use of the price of blood and the price of a dog, the one who takes (eats) usury the one who gives usury, the woman who practices tattooing and the woman who gets herself tattooed.

Narrated Abu Huraira 24

The Prophet said, "The effect of an evil eye is a fact." And he prohibited tattooing

3. Addiction Main line addicts have very high prevalence of Hepatitis B and C and they significantly contribute to the pool of chronic hepatitis n the West and America. Addiction in all forms is forbidden in Islam. In Quran it is stated in reference to drinking 25 (a common practice in Makka before Islam)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسَرُ وَالْأنْصَابُ وَالأَزْلاَمُ رَجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيَّاتِ الْمُحْرِجَةِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, of Satan's handwork: eschew such (abomination) that ye may prosper.

However the prophet Muhammad has clarified, that all intoxicants are Haram (absolutely forbidden). He said: " Every intoxicant is khamr, and every khamr is haram." Umar, the second Khalifah of the Prophet, declared from the pulpit of the Prophet: "Khamr is that which befogs the mind."

This issue has been decisively addressed in the following Ahadith of the prophet (SAW)

Narrated Aisha: 26

The Prophet said, "All drinks that produce intoxication are Haram (forbidden to drink).

Narrated Abi Burda 27

That Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari said that the Prophet had sent him to Yemen and he asked the Prophet about certain (alcoholic) drink which used to be prepared there. The Prophet said, "What are they?" Abu Musa said, "Al-Bit' and Al-Mizr?" He said, "Al-Bit is an
alcoholic drink made from honey; and Al-Mizr is an alcoholic drink made from barley." The Prophet said, "All intoxicants are prohibited."

**B: Sexual Transmission:**

Prostitutes and homosexuals are important sources of carrying hepatitis B and C viruses and transmitting it to others. Although this may not be very important cause of transmission in our society but it is a major cause in West and America.

1. **Prostitution:** Prostitutes are one of the main source of spreading the disease because they have one of the highest.\(^{28, 29}\) carrier rate of Hepatitis B and C and also HIV. It varies from 9-12\(^{30}\). Islam does not allow prostitution and strongly condemns it as clearly evident from the following Hadith.

**Narrated Aun bin Abu Juhaifa**\(^{31}\)

"……. He replied, "Allah's Apostle prohibited taking money for blood, the price of a dog, and the earnings of a slave-girl by prostitution; he cursed her who tattoos and her who gets tattooed, the eater of Riba (usury), and the maker of pictures."

Islam forbids sex with a women other than wife and discoursages and warns not even to get indulge in activity which might lead to abnormal sexual temptations and thus a risk of involvement in adultery.

Sexual contact with a person other than wife is forbidden in Islam.

In Quran it is stated\(^{32}\)

\[
\text{وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الْزِّنَى إِنَّهُْ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَسِبٍل}
\]

Nor come near to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils).

In another Surah the good sexual behavior of people is described as a standard of human "success" in the eyes of Allah and those who cross the prescribed limits, are labeled as transgressors

1. **Qd**: أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ The believers must (eventually) win through,

5. **Wālādīn**: هُمُ لِفُرُوحِ جَهَمَ حَافِظُونَ Who abstain from sex
Except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or whom their right hands possess, for (in their case) they are free from blame.

But those whose desires exceed those limits are transgressors

The prophet Muhammad (SAW) also stresses on the issue. In Sahih Bukhari, Ibn Abbas quoted a Hadith from the prophet (SAW) 33

"I have not seen a thing resembling 'lamam' (minor sins) than what Abu Huraira 'narrated from the Prophet who said "Allah has written for Adam's son his share of adultery which he commits inevitably. The adultery of the eyes is the sight (to gaze at a forbidden thing), the adultery of the tongue is the talk, and the inner self wishes and desires and the private parts testify all this or deny it."

2. Homosexuality. It is well known that homosexual behavior is a major risk factor in transmission of hepatitis B and C. Chronic hepatitis B and C are more common in Guy men when compared with general population.34 This behavior also, leads to transmission of other diseases including STDs and HIV 35

Islam strongly condemns homosexuality. In Quran it is stated 36

"We also sent Lut : He said to his people : "Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you? For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds."
In another Ayah Allah says,  

أَتَأْتُونَ الدُّكَارَانَ مِنْ الْعَالِمِينَ- وَتَذَرُونَ مَا خَلَقْتُ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمُ بَلْ أَنتُمْ قَوْمٌ عَادُونَ

"Of all the creatures in the world, will ye approach males and leave those who Allah has created for to be your mates, Nay ye are a people transgressing (all limits)  

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also condemns this abnormal behavior. Two Ahadith are quoted below as example;  

"When a man mounts another man, the throne of God shakes."  

"Kill the one that is doing it and also kill the one that it is being done to." (in reference to the active and passive partners in gay sexual intercourse)  

3. Abnormal sexual behavior  

Anal sex is also strictly forbidden in Islam and it has been equated to sodomy. Few Ahadith are quoted below to explain this;  

Hazima bi Sabit narrated. …from Muhammad (SAW)  

“Do not perform anal sex with your wives” (quoted in Althirmizee. Nisaee and Masnad Ahmad)  

The one who performs sex with a menstruating woman or did an anal sex it is as if he does not accept the teaching (Shariat) of Muhammad (SAW) (Quoted in Masnad Ahmad)  

The risk of transmission is understandably more when there is damage to the normal mucosal linings of an organ or damage to the intact skin. Therefore the risk of transmission will be more in case of intercourse during the menstrual period. Islam has forbidden intercourse during this period.  

وَيَسَّلُونَكَ عَنْ المَحِيضِ قَلْ هُوَ أَدَى فَأَعْتَزَلُوا النَّسَاءَ فِي المَحِيضِ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّى يُطْهِرُنَّ فَإِذَا تَطْهِرُنَّ فَأَتُوهُنَّ مِنْهُ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ
They ask you concerning women’s courses. Say: They are a hurt and pollution: So keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them until they are clean. But when they have purified themselves, ye may approach them in any manner, time, or place ordained for you by Allah. For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.

These are some of the basic teachings of human behavior in Islam. It is clearly evident from these Islamic teachings that following and propagating these principles can not only protect human beings from deadly diseases like hepatitis B and C but also safeguard them against AIDS and other disease sharing similar routes of transmission.

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Note: All translation of Ayah are taken from Quran translation by Abdullah Yousaf Ali.