Commentary and Reply

Rabies in Iranian Traditional Medicine

Commentary on the Article by Gholami *et al.* (Vol. 2, No. 1, Pages 1-10)

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DEAR EDITOR,

In Vol.2, No.1, 2014, Journal of Medical Microbiology and Infection Diseases a paper entitled "Rabies in Iran: Past, Present and Future" was published. We are grateful to Dr. Alireza Gholami and colleagues for this fascinating paper. We read the paper with a great interest but there is one point that should be taken into consideration. The authors have claimed that the discovery of rabies goes back to 2300 BC, when the Greek philosophers and physicians described it as a dangerous disease caused by a mad dog biting [1]. However, there is no mention of the contribution of the Iranian or Islamic traditional medicine to this discovery. Many of the historical evidence suggest that the treatment of many infectious diseases, like rabies was based on research carried out by Iranian scientists. One of these leading (Persian) scholars was Avicenna (980-1037 AD), who had a great dominance in the treatment of infectious diseases such as rabies. The Canon of Medicine (Al-Qanun-phi-al-Tibb) which is one of the most important textbooks used in many medical specialties depict Avicenna's research on rabies as well as his attempts to prevent the disease [2].

In the ancient Persian books, the word "Hari" referred to a kind of madness that was inflicted through contact with infected saliva transmitted through bites or scratches. In this book (Al-Qanun-phi-al-Tibb), Avicenna has described the symptoms of rabies and that the disease is caused by a toxic substance in the saliva of rabid animals which can result in an incurable disease [3].

Due to the existence of such documents in relation to the great Iranian scientists like Avicenna, whose research has contributed the advancement of medical science in his own time and also comprises the base of many advances in modern medicine, it is of utmost importance to appreciate their efforts and achievements to the world and especially to the Iranian scientific community.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this manuscript.

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Reply to Commentary on "Rabies in Iran: Past, Present and Future"

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From etymological point of view, the word rabies could have come from Sanskrit *rabhas* meaning "to do violence", and the Greek word *lyssa* or *lytta* describing genus of the virus which also means "madness". The history of rabies goes back to ancient manuscripts and its diabolical fame was principally due to the violent nature of the disease [1]. For a long period of time, people who were infected with rabies virus through an animal bite would become victims of unproved treatments, as mentioned in the prelude of our article [2]. On the other hand, the era of scientific description of rabies did not begin before the 19th century [3]. There have definitely existed great scientists between these two historical episodes such as Avicenna and Rhazes, the Iranian scholars who have described symptoms of rabies both in humans and dogs [4]. The authors, by no means, disregard these scholars and others who are undoubtedly some of the greatest ever scientists in medical sciences. However, the article focuses on the treatment of the disease since the introduction of established post exposure prophylaxis (PEP), regardless of the disease ancientness. At the same time, history of contemporaneous Iranian scientists, who had important contributions to development and sharing new method of rabies PEP in the world is described. In addition, ways a properly structured and well supported research and observation could result in a decisive global conclusion have been discussed. Altogether, as far as it concerns the past history of rabies in Iran, this article looks at the rabies disease in the country through sequential contemporary events that eventually revolutionized rabies PEP in the world.

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