

# Avicenna's Role in Generating Medical Records

## TİBBİ KAYITLARIN ÜRETİLMESİNDE İBN SİNA'NIN ROLÜ

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### Abstract

The experts and scientists need to write in order to communicate their ideas with the others. Science would have never achieved such a great development, if scientists hadn't transferred results of their research to their next generations on the basis of written materials. With the aid of official scientific books and journals, we get informed of various scientific developments. On the other hand with the methods of our predecessors; we could develop its branches.

Drawing on the walls of caves, clay tablets, papyrus or skin scrolls are some examples of early records of science and knowledge by our ancestors left for present people. The format of ancient books and essays are surely different from modern and common ones, but from the viewpoint of recording information they have sufficient importance, and they can be said to be of equal importance as books today.

The growth and development of medicine cannot be anyhow excluded.

After attending and treating a patient, the doctors record the results of their examinations and findings in the form of patients written files. These authentic documents, known as medical records will serve as training instrument for future physicians. Thus, to write a scientific essay, one must gather arranged and precise findings related to the theme of essay. From the past to the present time, physicians have always produced data in the form of medical records while attending patients and then arranged them so as to write their scientific essays and to present them to next generations.

Avicenna, a great Iranian medical genius, who has gained global fame made his compilation on the basis of Hippocrates works. He gathered and compiled what he has learned in his trips as physician and finally left his famous essays titled "canon of medicine". It can be concluded that, he, in his era had noticed the role and importance of authentication, and had set about producing medical records.

The author, in this essay, deals with Avicenna's Role in generating medical records and the role of such records in medical education development.

**Key Words:** Medical records, Avicenna, history of medicine

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### Özet

Uzmanlar ve bilim adamları, fikirlerini diğerleriyle bağdaştırmak için yazmak zorundadırlar. Bilim adamları, araştırmalarının sonuçlarını yazılı materyaller temelinde gelecek kuşaklara aktarmasalar, bilim bu kadar büyük bir gelişmeyi hiçbir zaman başaramazdı. Resmi bilimsel kitaplar ve dergilerin yardımıyla, çeşitli bilimsel gelişmeler hakkında bilgi edinmekteyiz. Diğer yandan, seleflerimizin yöntemleri ile bilim dallarını geliştirebildik.

Mağara duvarlarındaki resimler, kil tabletler, papirüs ya da deri parşömenler, bilimin ilk kayıtlarının bazı örnekleridir ve atalarımızın bilgileri bugünkü insanlara kaldı. Antik çağ kitaplarının ve denemelerinin formatı, modern ve yaygın olanlardan muhakkak farklıdır, ancak kayıtlı bilgi açısından yeterli bir öneme sahiptirler ve bugünkü kitaplar kadar eşit önemde oldukları söylenebilir.

Tıbbın büyümesi ve gelişmesi her ne şekilde olursa olsun engellenemez.

Doktorlar, hastaya baktıktan ve tedavi ettikten sonra muayenelelerinin ve bulgularının sonuçlarını, hastaların yazılı dosyaları şeklinde kaydederler. Tıbbi kayıtlar olarak bilinen bu güvenilir dökümanlar, geleceğin hekimleri için eğitim aracı olarak kullanılırlar. Böylece, bilimsel deneme yazmak için bir kimsenin, denemenin konusu ile ilgili düzenlenmiş ve kesin olan bulguları bir araya getirmesi gerekir. Geçmişten günümüze, hekimler her zaman hastaya baktıkları sırada tıbbi kayıt formunda bilgi üretirler ve daha sonra bilimsel denemelerini yazmak ve gelecek kuşaklara sunmak için bu bilgileri düzenlerler.

Dünya çapında ün kazanmış olan büyük tıp dehası İbn Sina, Hippokrat çalışmaları temelinde kendi derlemesini yaptı. Hekim olarak yaptığı gezilerde öğrendiklerini bir araya getirdi ve derledi ve sonuç olarak ünlü denemesi "Kanun"u bıraktı. Sonuç çıkarmak gerekirse, İbn Sina kendi çağında belgelemenin rolüne ve önemine dikkat çekmiş ve tıbbi kayıtların üretimine başlamıştır.

Yazar bu derlemede, tıbbi kayıtların üretilmesinde İbn Sina'nın rolüne ve bu tür kayıtların tıp eğitiminin gelişmesindeki rolüne değinmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tıbbi kayıtlar, İbn Sina, tıp tarihi

Writing is one of the most important means of rendering knowledge. Researchers all around the world have left their findings, in the course of time, in written materials. Knowledge and science have reached their present developed status due to writing and recording. Scientists believe that memory cannot be depended upon, since in the course of time part of memory and

hence learning will be forgotten. Therefore, having needed something other than memory, man chose to write. Of course, before inventing letters, man started written communication by drawings such as these found on cave-walls.

One of the reasons that man preferred cave-walls for his drawing might be that these places are less subject to natural factors of wearing, so his data would be safe for a longer time. In any event, different color-drawings found on cave-walls especially those pertaining to old stone age or the tablets relating to thousands of years ago in which drilling skull or cut ling fingers are clearly observable, as well as discoveries conducted in Spanish caves pertaining to the middle stone age, and many more facts dating back to 25000 years ago, all indicate that man has long wished to render his findings to his next generation, and has always used writing as such as media.

Indeed, there is no difference in what kind of data had been rendered this way, since studies have clarified that all human findings have been recorded this way.

Referring to the history of medicine, we can recognize that those who have dealt with the treatment of patients, as physicians, gained their knowledge in the medical field, generally by studying other physicians, writing. They, then, started to practice medicine after having learned practical courses, as apprentice physicians, with their masters. Taking a glance at the history of medicine, we will realize that this history owes its existence and progress basically to the writings of physicians. They first used to teach medicine in centers called medical schools and then would cure their patients. Then they would leave their findings in form of manuscripts. Live certificate of rendering knowledge to next generations include: carved pictures on ancient caves, pictorial tablets or clay blocks in Babylon and Nineveh eras; hieroglyphic writings found in Egyptian temples and streets; Greek and Roman skin scrolls, and other kinds of manuscripts.<sup>1</sup>

From the professional point of view, though these scripts are not at all comparable with modern records, the progress of science and knowledge greatly owe to the ancient manuscripts.

### Explanation

Having a clear explanation of medical records seems highly necessary in this part. A medical record means sufficient information about complete recognition of a specific patient, recording, which is the basic way of rendering information. (It is worth noting that today computerized recording is also usable). The question is that where do the authentic materials come from? Some thing is known for sure from the past so far, and that is the fundamental part of authentic materials in medical field is gathered clinically. These data can include symptoms, finding,

method of treatment, the result of treatment process, and even tracing illness after health, therefore since there are the same authentic materials as the number of the patients, these data are more valuable and wider than those gotten in laboratories. They can also help development of science. In other words, not all data, which serve the development of science, are only produced in laboratories. There are also other medias such as clinical aberrations, which can help develop human knowledge. After having produced these data, we must compile and format them so that can be useful for future generations. Great variety of data normally causes disturbances. Thus, there are some special forms called medical records forms to be filled out so as to format data before production.

Medical records are advantageous for:<sup>2</sup>

- 1- the basis of programming and ensuring the progress of treatment.
- 2- A link between physicians and other hospital personnel's who deal with patients.
- 3- Providing authentic material to identify the sickness pattern and treatment
- 4- The basis of survey and evaluation
- 5- Legal help and support to the patients, hospitals, and responsible staff
- 6- Research and trainings

As it was mentioned as advantages of medical records, one of the aims of producing these records is to form a basis for research and study. But why should we study? The answer is all studies help increase sciences and aid scientists to develop and achieve better knowledge. Hence medical records, produced clinically, are the basic means of training and development of medical education.<sup>3</sup>

Avicenna and development of medical science:

In regard to what was mentioned before, taking a glance at Avicenna's biography, we can realize that he received just a bit of training from his contemporary professors, and then by studying all medical books existing in his era he could gain access to all the knowledge at his very early age. He soon managed to become the best physician of his time. As we know today, he has compiled his works on the basis of Hippocrates's works. Then after gathering and combining them together, he achieved forming sets of scientific essays, which have existed so far.<sup>4</sup>

Hippocrates, of course, had gotten his primary information in Esculapia's temples. Laying aside superstitions, he founded the bases of scientific medicine. He recorded his precise observations of physical symptoms and ailments as well as kind of sicknesses.<sup>5</sup> Thus he leaves lots of medical works. Avicenna, in turn, studied Hippocratic works and recorded his information in the same way, and

passed it to his next generations. Various trips he took were advantageous for him and he could write more materials and could find different kinds of illnesses. These led to 40 essays on medical science. His book, canon of medicine, was so complete and comprehensive that it had been taught in European universities till 1909.<sup>6</sup>

Avicenna studied human body anatomically and analytically. (In Hippocrates era, ancient Greeks would highly respect human corpses; as a result it would be quiet difficult to get access to a corpse to study in anatomically. Therefore Avicenna's knowledge about anatomy was very limited. Canon of medicine, compiled in five volumes, is written in Arabic, which used to be the scientific language of that time the first volume-known as generalities deals with general statements of medicine. The second volume covers drugs and effective materials. This volume is arranged alphabetically and contains 760 different drugs. The third volume concerns deceases and contains 22 chapters dealing with the places of sickness from head to toe respectively. The fourth volume talks about ailments such as fever, which does not concern a specific organ. Fifth volume indicates how to make compound drugs. In different parts of this book, there are pictures of body organs and different bones.<sup>7</sup>

To sum it up, taking a glance at the above mentioned, we could conclude that there weren't such medical records, there would be some disadvantages such as the lass of ancient experiences, repeating the others findings and experiment and the lack of scientific development.

The role of medical knowledge, of course, is quite obvious in training physicians. In other words, physicians pass what they want to their next generation, and this generation will found a brighter future by studying the works of their precedes.

### Results

Taking the above-mentioned into account we can conclude that without the existence of medical records, there would be no development in medical sciences. The previous records and documents, having been prepared clinically and passed over to the next generations is approving of this claim.

As it was mentioned before the canon of medicine, by Avicenna, is based on believes of Hippocrates, which made the spread of medicine possible by recording kins of illnesses. This book is of great value in medical sciences. After having attended to the patient, Avicenna gathered the results of his findings in the form of medical records by observing the symptoms of the illnesses. These observations and formed a valuable essay. In other words he like his professors, had realized the role and importance of authentication and medical record, and did a great deal in producing them.

What he had processed, has done a world of good to the medical science and the development of medical education, long after his death; teaching his boons in European universities shows the world-wide importance of Avicenna's works.

Undoubtedly, Avicenna is one of the mast valuable fruits of the tremendous tree of medical science, and a phenomenon of Iranian great civilization. He belongs not only to Iranian civilization, but to the human civilization as well.

According to what medical-record experts believe, Avicenna is an obvious character of a responsible physician who has done a lat in authentication by paying attention to treatment of his patients. The treatment of a patient can be considered complete and effective only when his conditions are recorded precisely in his medical records.

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