

ORIGINAL ARTICLE


A Study of the Clinical Findings of Muslim Physicians Concerning Uterus Cancer Based on Medical books: *Firdous al-Hikmah, Kamil al-Sana al-Tibbiya, Al-Hawi fi al-Tibb, Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*

Abstract

Uterus cancer is one of the women's diseases clinically diagnosed by some Muslim physicians. These physicians wrote about the symptoms, the effects of this disease on infertility or damage to the fetus, as well as some treatments, including surgery for this disease. The present study is aimed at focusing on this disease through presenting a descriptive-comparative method and the breakthroughs of the prominent Muslim physicians in the diagnosis of cancerous lumps of uterus, the characteristics of these lumps as being benign or malignant, the incurability of this disease in the case of the spreading growth of the tumor and the clinical effects of this disease.

Key words: Uterine Neoplasms, Female, Infertility, Avicenna, Ali Ibn sahl Rabbn al-Tabari, Ali Ibn Abbas Majoosi, Razi

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Introduction

Scholars such as, *Ali Ibn Rabbn Tabari* (192 -260 A.H.), *Mohammad Ibn Zakaria Razi* (251-313 A.H.), *Ali Ibn Abbas Majoosi Ahwazi* (death 383 A.H.), and *Avicenna* (370 – 428 A.H.) launched a medical revolution in the Islamic civilization from the 9th to the 11th century. The Books of these scholars, namely, *Firdous al-Hikmah*, *al-Hawi fi al-Tibb*, *al-Mansuri fi al-Tibb*, *Kamil al-Sana'ah al-Tibbiya*, and *Qanun*, have been considered as the encyclopedias in Islamic medicine and global reference books since their publication.

These physicians diagnosed cancer as the black bile (melancholic) swelling, generated by warm black bile or at times by warm yellow bile (cholera) or phlegm combined with thick yellow bile. They described cancer as a very painful and hurting swelling. According to Avicenna, “this swelling is at first in the shape of an almond or a little smaller than that. It then grows daily to the point where it encloses the vessels around itself, making them stiff and rigid. In this stage, some red and green vessels which resemble a crab’s legs appear on this lump, and the cancerous lump itself will look like a crab’s stomach. The cancerous material grows and spreads and fills the inside of the adjacent vessels and even fills the space around the vessels and makes them hard and stiff. According to Muslim scholars, this lump neither shrinks nor moves, but encapsulates all its surrounding vessels and spreads into them until it infects them too.”¹

Ali Ibn Rabbn Tabari quoting Hippocrates about the curability of cancer states that cancer cannot be treated and even if the patient survives, this disease lasts for a long time. He also mentions that if cancer takes root in the vital organs of the patient, it is very unlikely to be treated. But if it is around the main organs or in organs which can be amputated, the patient enjoys a better chance to survive.²

Diagnosis of Uterus Cancer in the Works of Muslim Physician

According to Razi, “Uterus cancer is a reddish rough, thick, and stiff swelling which grows in the cervix. It causes a big pain in the groin, lower belly, external organs,

1- Avicenna, 2004: 278.

2- Tabari, 2002: 227.



and the back and when touched by hand, it is extremely painful. If the swelling is infected and secretes pus, it must be a warm swelling, which has no treatment but its pain severity can be alleviated.”³

Razi has also identified the signs of uterus cancer as a stiff and hard lump, which is hard from the early stages of the tumor formation. He has described its symptom as a very painful and dry cervix which feels like a big needle going into the uterus. It is sometimes accompanied by pus. The other clinical symptom, mentioned by Razi, is that if the lump is infected, the pus is thin with strong stench.

The works of Ali Ibn Abbas Majoosi in the field of women diseases, fetus condition and its growth as well as uterus cancer and the scientific methods of its diagnosis have made a massive breakthrough in the diagnosis of women’s diseases and in particular, uterus cancer. Ali Ibn Abbas has stressed that this disease is not curable and in case a malignant lump is present, then the treatment is impossible.⁴

The Muslim physicians acquired valuable clinical and scientific information on categorizing the cancerous tumors into two types of benign and malignant. They believed that the cancer and the ulcers in the uterus would lead to a malignant lump. The excessive black bile (melancholy) in the body, the remaining of the skin around the fetus in mother’s body at the time of labor, the remaining of the dead fetus in the mother’s body, the absorption of the fetus in the uterus, a severe tear in the cervix at the time of labor, the wounds still remaining unhealed, and the formation of lumps in the cervix for various reasons were among the reasons leading to the generation of malignant tumors. The clinical diagnosis of the malignant lumps was dependent on the heaviness, stiffness and broadness of the lumps as well as the closure of the urinary tract. The cancer without ulcer was diagnosed through the examination of the lump which was greenish with no specific shape. The cancer with ulcer was diagnosed through the pus, infection and stench. Also, the wounds in the uterus were diagnosed, depending on the feeling of pain or the effects they made at the time of intercourse or the secretion in the uterus.

3- Razi, 2001: 109.

4- Majusi, 2008, Vol. 2: 49.



The Phases of Uterus Cancer Treatment from the View Point of Muslim Physicians

1- Alleviation of the pain in the cancerous lumps and ulcers

It is noteworthy to say that there have been different methods concerning cancer treatment and the alleviation of related pain. In many cases, these methods are quite similar. For reducing painful lumps with roots spread which is incurable, some tranquillizers and medications are prescribed to prevent or decrease its progress. Also, in the book "*Firdous al- Hikmah*" with a Chapter on Balms, Ali Ibn Rabbn has talked about the effect of the "Marham al-Rosul" (Ointment of the Apostles) on diminishing the pain of cancer and other lumps inside the uterus.⁵ In fact, at that time, the mentioned balm was the most common treatment for cancer pain prescribed by Muslim physicians. Also a mixture of boiled fenugreek (*trigonella foenum-graecum*) seeds, hollyhock (*Alcea*), and malva for washing the reproductive organ as well as wax and oil for rubbing on the organ were recommended. Another way to ease the pain was the preparation of a balm containing the milk of a nursing woman or the juice of lamb's tongue, gooseberry (*ribes grossularia*; Herb with other names like Fox grape, etc.)⁶ juice, purslane (*portulaca oleracea*) juice, polygonum avicular (*Herb called "Crataegus aemula"*, whose stem and seeds were reddish purple and were abundant in the gardens)⁷ juice, and lukewarm oil extracted from red rose, and the injection of this balm into the uterus. In the case of uterus bleeding, other medications were prescribed: white lead ore (*cerussite*), Armenian bole, ephedra juice, and opium were mixed with the above-mentioned medications and put into the vagina. Razi prescribed another vaginal medication for cancer pains, consisting of cooked lentil juice, mule milk, and lamb's tongue juice. He also considered brewed plantago psyllium, black nightshade (*solanum nigrum*) seed, and hashish seed effective.⁸

Regarding cancer ulcers generated by malignant lumps, the physicians used to ease the pain by cooling drugs and tranquilizers. If a bad-smelling infection was secreted from the ulcers, its treatment was the same as treatment for cancer with ulcer. But if uterus had bleeding, a piece of cotton moistened by a mixture of lamb's tongue juice,

5- Tabari, 2002: 343.

6- Jorjani, 2012: 437.

7- Amiri, 1974: 267-268.

8- Razi, 2001: 110.



dragon's blood (*dracaena cinnabari*), Armenian bole, sazanaj powder, (Sazanaj, an Arabic name for "Shahdaneh" in Persian, resembling lentil in shape but more fragile and in different colors)⁹ aloe, boswellia, cerussite, and opium were recommended to be placed into the vagina. If, after inserting these medication, uterus bleeding increased, the patient was advised to take amber tablet orally. In the book "Kamil al-Sana'ah al-Tibbiya", Ali Ibn Abbas Majusi considered the cancer in the uterus or any other organs incurable. However, he recommended certain medications for lowering the progression of cancer and alleviating the pain. In order to ease the pain, he advised the woman to sit in a boiled essence of hollyhock, dill, fenugreek, flax seed, and yellow sweet clove (*melilotus officinalis*) seed. Or a mixture of fenugreek seeds, flax seeds, beet seeds, dry violet (*viola*), laurel (*laurus nobilis*) seed, german chamomile (*matricaria chamomilla*), yellow sweet clove, celeriac blossom, and broad bean powder were grounded and then added to the boiling pine or poplar resin. After that, the grounded dried fig was mixed with lily oil, the juice of pig and duck fat, and white wax. Finally, all these materials were mixed and made into a kind of ointment and rubbed onto the organ. This ointment could ease the pain and soften the hard swellings and even diminish them.¹⁰

2- Treatment of Cancerous Tumors

Dividing the cancerous lumps into two groups of benign and malignant, Razi puts forward a treatment for them: "the treatment for the benign lump before it gets hard and makes progress is the same as the treatment for malignant lumps, but if the disease gets chronic, it cannot be cured. At early stages of the disease, a mixture of cooked date juice, juniper seed, yolk of the egg, roasted barley bran and powder, opium, fresh cotiander, chicory, and the *polygonum aviculare* seed should be put on the lump, and then a balm containing wax, red rose oil, ales oil and cooked date should be applied onto the lump."¹¹

In his book "Al-Mansuri Fi Tibb", the chapter on swellings and cancerous ulcers, Razi elaborates on infected secretions from the uterus, and after classifying these ulcers, prescribes some treatments. Based on the assumption that one of the reasons for frequent secretion could be due to

9- Amiri, 1974: 219.

10- Majusi, 2008, Vol. 4: 182.

11- Razi, 2001: 132.



cancerous ulcers, he suggests some treatments. According to his prescription, if the secretion is accompanied by pins and needles feeling and pain, and the lump has a stiff tissue which can be felt by hand, some lead chips or cerussite balm should be inserted into the vagina.¹²

Ali Ibn Abbas prescribes that during the treatment period, the patient needs to avoid warm and melancholic food and should instead have an easy-to-digest diet, including fresh whole meal bread, high-quality meat, and digestible meat of the birds, chicory and lettuce mixed with olive oil, salty olive, cooked spinach, fig, almond, grapes, pear, sweet plum, and the like.¹³

3- Surgery of the Uterus Cancer

In the medical books, the surgery of the uterus is also recommended at early stages of the cervix cancer. In the case of cervix cancer, in particular, medical therapy is considered arduous and non-effective, although the lumps in the cervix are more accessible than the lumps inside the uterus.

According to Majusi Ahwazi, the treatment of the cancerous lumps could be gradually achieved by the help of medications. He also recommends that the organ infected by the cancerous lump be cut off by a knife or a razor. If a malignant cancerous lump grows, then, there would be no cure and it must be removed in a way that no root or trace be left.¹⁴ With regard to the removal of lumps and cysts, Majusi states that: "First the skin should be torn carefully without any tear in the bag containing the lump. Then, the bag of lump should be grabbed by hook in a way that nothing is left after the removal of the lump, or it will relapse".¹⁵

In his book "Qanun", Avicenna elaborates on the treatment of the developed cancerous lump by surgery. He states: "If the swelling of cancer is small, it could be cut off. The instruction for the surgery is as follows: it is essential that besides the lump itself, whatever is affected by it and whatever is adjacent to it be removed completely in order that nothing affected by that cancer is left to be fed. Let the organ being operated bleed a lot It is possible that after the removal of the lump, its place needs

12- Razi, 2008: 500.

13- Majusi, 2008, Vol. 1: 115.

14- Majusi, 2008, Vol. 2: 49.

15- Majusi, 2008, Vol. 1: 115.



to be burnt, but the problem is that in some cases burning the place causes a big danger. In other words, in the case that the cancerous lump is near a vital and sensitive organ, burning the place of the lump can make the patient horribly suffer.”¹⁶

16- Avicenna, 2007: 102.

Conclusion

The four physicians mentioned in this research, through their precise clinical observations, provided an accurate diagnosis for the uterus cancer. From the 3rd century to the first half of the 5th century (A.H), these physicians gained the most valuable clinical experience in the field of uterus cancer or stiff swelling of uterus. Having studied the works of these scholars, the researchers concluded that these scientists had acquired accurate theoretical and clinical information concerning the incurability of cancer in the case of late diagnosis, as well as the distinction between malignant and benign tumors.

Cancerous ulcers and the reasons for their emergence were identified clinically and experimentally by Razi. Some of the differences and similarities between uterus cancer and other women diseases were identified both clinically and scientifically. In the works of these scientists, concerning the alleviation of pain, several cooling balms and tranquilizers as well as some instructions for their preparation were suggested. In this study, it was observed that even though there was a small difference between the preparation methods of balms, suppositories, and other medications prescribed for the vaginal use, there was still an identical method of prescription in the practice of these physicians, which had gone through some slight transformation through experience. Muslim scholars unanimously believed that if all the methods failed or general physical weakness prevailed against the patient then surgery would be considered as the last resort. Accordingly, they provided some reliable methods of surgery. Also, they explained some treatments for the burning of the tumor roots. Regarding nutrition, these scientists gave some precious advice. Foods which could enhance the patient's strength, were easy to digest, and were prepared while according to the patient's temperament were highly recommended.



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