

## The idea of rehabilitation began with the Sumerians

Yusuf Kemal KEMALOĞLU<sup>1\*</sup>, Pinar YAPRAK KEMALOĞLU<sup>2</sup>, Güven MENGÜ<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Audiology Subdivision, Department of ENT, Faculty of Medicine, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

<sup>2</sup>Health Science Institute, Marmara University, İstanbul, Turkey

<sup>3</sup>Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Letters, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey

Received: 16.05.2012 • Accepted: 16.07.2012 • Published Online: 18.01.2013 • Printed: 18.02.2013

As stated by Arda and Aksu, history is a discipline that studies processes. In a paper about deaf servants in the Hittites' Palace, it was concluded that the history of medicine may explain the relations that perhaps would never been proven in real life and therefore fill in some of the gaps in the puzzle (1). In this context, rehabilitation is an interesting topic, because particularly beliefs about the cause of disability play a significant role in determining attitudes toward people with disabilities (PWD) (2). It is a fact that, at some point in history, disability has even been considered a sign of sin or divine punishment (3). Plato (427–347 BC) said that “it will leave the unhealthy to die, and those whose psychological constitution is incurably corrupt it will put to death” (4). That is, modern rehabilitation and disability concepts appear to have not originated from this perspective. Major developments in this era started after the First and Second World Wars, with the emergence of more democratic and social states in the Western world (3).

Nevertheless, a Sumerian legend (Enki and Ninmah) about human creation (5) points out that Sumerians' way of thinking fits in with the basic principles noted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (6). In this story (5), Enki and Ninmah, the god and goddess in charge of human creation (7), talk about PWD. When Ninmah said to Enki: “Man's body can be either good or bad, and whether I make a fate good or bad depends on my will”, Enki answered her by saying that this fate will be counterbalanced by his

supernal abilities. Then he rehabilitated some PWD and completed the process by giving them proper jobs.

This legend clearly points out 3 major items that fully underlie the modern disability concept in UNCRPD: i) They can be rehabilitated and rehabilitation positively changes fate (article-1 (6)). ii) One of the ultimate targets of rehabilitation is to ‘give him/her bread’, which, in modern life, refers to one of the strong components of ‘full inclusion’ in society and independence by succeeding vocational ability (articles-26–27 (6)). iii) In philosophy, the legend underlines the fact that both disabilities and the facilities for their rehabilitation come from the same origin, which means they are part of nature. We may clearly conclude that, as in contemporary understanding, the Sumerians consider that there is no ‘sin’ or ‘unnaturalness’ related to the idea of rehabilitation. It either comes from nature or the creator. It is related to ability, that is, science and sources we are able to use.

Although the principles in CRPD have been a product of the long-lasting fight by PWD and their families and friends in the West (3), in this letter, we wanted to visualize that the human mind in Mesopotamia (3–4000 BC) has been simply enough to recognize real goodness (in Turkish, “*erdem*”) (5). Since Sumer was the first civilization to use a writing system and initiated many other contemporary social institutions, Kramer pronounced that history begins with the Sumerians (7). This legend shows that the contemporary rehabilitation idea also began with the Sumerians.

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\* Correspondence: yusufk@gazi.edu.tr

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