Islamic perspective on health is viewed as one of the greatest blessing that God has bestowed on mankind. It is broader than World Health Organization (1948) definition of health of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. It should be noted that in Islam the greatest blessing after faith is health as narrated in the following Hadith: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “Ask Allah (Subhānahu Wa Ta’ālā) for forgiveness and health, for after being granted certainty, one is given nothing better than health” (Narrated by Al-Tirmidhi). Islam differs from other religions in that it concerns itself with both this life as well as the hereafter. A Muslim’s quest for good health is in conformity with his salvation in the life hereafter, as much as for the enjoyment of life in this world, Allah (Subhānahu Wa Ta’ālā) say, “O you who believe, fear Allah, and let every soul look to what it sends forward for the tomorrow. And fear Allah; Allah is aware of what you do. And be not as those who forgot Allah, so He caused them to forget their own souls. These! They are the transgressors” (Qur’an; Al-Hasyr: 59:18-19). It has been narrated that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “No one will be allowed to move from his position on the Day of Judgement until he has been asked how he spent his life, how he used his knowledge, how he earns and spent his money and in what pursuits he used his health” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi).

Public health practices play an important role in disease prevention efforts. It has early roots from the beginning of human civilization. Early religions attempted to regulate behaviour that specifically related to health, from the types of food eaten, to regulate certain indulgent behaviours, such as drinking alcohol or sexual relations. During Roman times, it was well understood that the practices of proper diversion of human waste was a necessary tenet of public health in urban areas, and the ancient Chinese medical doctors developed the practice of variolation following a smallpox epidemic around 1000 BC. During the 14th century Black Death in Europe (during epidemic of plague) practices of removing bodies of the dead would further prevent the spread of the bacterial infection by rodent-borne fleas. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, associated with living standards amongst the working population,
cramped and unsanitary urban conditions, the cholera pandemic devastated Europe and other public health episodes had lead to development of modern public health in late 18th centuries.

In contrast to early civilization focused on public health practices, Islamic teaching based on The Qur’an¹, The Sunnah² and Ijtihad³ lays principle of practice to be follows by all Muslim in life today and hereafter. These Islamic laws categories into one of five: fard⁴, mustahib⁵, mubah⁶, makrooh⁷, and haram⁸. Actions that fall under the first four categories are considered religiously lawful, whereas actions that fall under the fifth category are considered unlawful. The Qur’an is primarily concerns man’s to road of spiritual, mental and physical well being, but Qur’an also directs man’s attention to the science of creation and urges him to explore and discover that which was made subservient to him. The holy Qur’an says: “Do you not see that Allah has made subservient to you everything in the heavens and the earth and has made his bounty flow to you in exceeding measure: seen and unseen…” (Qur’an; Luqman, 31:20).

Numerous examples in the Qur’an and Sunnah lays principles to be follow by Muslims to live a healthy life, some of the examples are; the protection of environment from pollution is an individual religious duty of every Muslim, Allah (Subhana Wa Ta’alla) says, “...and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order” (Qur’an; Al-A’raf, 7:56); in another verses Allah (Subhana Wa Ta’alla) indicated severe punishment to whom causes mischief on earth, “...if anyone, after God’s favour Has come to him, substitutes (the favour with something else) Allah is strict in His punishment” (Qur’an; Al-Baqarah, 2:211). Food contamination by means of bacteria, parasites, chemicals or poisons contaminations might cause diseases or food poisoning, hygiene practices by Muslim recognized these, Allah (Subhana Wa Ta’alla) says, “...so eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God, and do no evil nor mischief on (the face of the) earth” (Qur’an; Al-Baqarah, 2:60). Islam also prohibited eating impure food, “Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than God; That which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; That which hath been (partly) eaten by a wild animal; Unless you are able to slaughter it (in due form); That which is sacrificed for stone (altars)...” (Qur’an; Al-Ma’idah, 5: 3).

Islam also provides some basic measures appropriate in control and prevention of diseases. These include meticulous hand washing, covering the mouth when sneezing or coughing, proper disposal of tissues, staying at home and away from public places, and in extreme cases of epidemic and quarantine. Islam is a religion of cleanliness, as Allah (Subhana Wa Ta’alla) says, “...truly, Allah loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves.”(Qur’an; Al-Baqarah, 2:222). In general Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said cleanliness is mentioned as half of faith, therefore, it is important to keep the body fresh and clean and Islam insists on several practices to facilitate this. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Cover cups and closely tighten the mouth of kraters (from which you drink) because there is a night in the year on which pests infect any uncovered cup or krater” (Narrated by Muslim). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instituted strategies for isolation and quarantine that are today implemented by public health authorities. He commanded his followers not to travel to places known to be afflicted with illness and he advised those in the contaminated areas or communities not to leave and spread the disease further afield. He (peace be upon him) said, “If you hear that there is a plague in a land, do not enter it; and if it (plague) visits a land while you are therein, do not go out of it” (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim). He (peace be upon him) also counselled ill people not to visit healthy people.
Healthy living is part and parcel of Islam, introduced with the inception of Islam more than 14 centuries ago. Furthermore, the Qur’an and the Sunnah outline the teachings that show every Muslim how to protect his health and live life in a state of purity. All Muslims should not forget our responsibilities towards our own bodies which have been given to us as a trust. We will be questioned if we do not keep the trust. We must know about health, health care and diseases. The Holy Qur’an lays down basic observances for the preservation of individual and social health through teaching cleanliness, exercise and nutrition. The following sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are used to encourage patients to seek proper treatments in time of illness: "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its remedy" (Narrated Abu Huraira r.a). “Taking proper care of one's health is the right of the body” (Narrated by al-Bukhari). “The Prophet (peace be upon him) not only instructed sick people to take medicine, but he himself invited expert physicians for this purpose” (Narrated by Abu Daud).

On these regards the International Journal of Public Health and Clinical Sciences (IJPICS) would provide venue for Muslim scholars, researchers and scientists to forward their works in this area. In this issue of IJPICS is publishing four works by Muslim academicians on related Islam and public health practices. First article by Dr Anita Abdul Rahman reviewed public health practices in Islam, and followed by three articles discussing on applications of Islamic principles and laws in public health; in prevention and control of HIV/AIDS by Associate Professor Dato’ Dr Faisal Ibrahim, use of tobacco by Associate Professor Dr Muhamad Hanafiah Juni, and Ramadhan fasting and voluntary fasting related with weight control by Dr Suriani Ismail. In future IJPICS welcome more Muslim scholars, academicians, researchers and scientists publishing their work to helping us to appreciate ever more the power and wisdom of Allah (Subhana Wa Ta’ala). Wallahu-A’alam.

1 The Qur’an; The holy book of Islam
2 The Sunnah; A large collection of recorded mannerisms, statements, and actions of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).
3 The ijtihad; The law of deductive logic, which, drawing on the above sources, allows trained scholars to consider the merits of novel issues and developments. It is this process of intellectual endeavour that provides Islamic law with its inherent evolutionary capacity.
4 Mandatory
5 Encouraged
6 Neutral
7 Discouraged
8 Prohibited