

Middle ages assignment

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BUSTER**

Relations Period: 04 Health and medicine in the Middle ages (Dark ages) were very important aspects of life. For many peasants in Medieval England, disease and poor health were part of their daily lives. Medicines were both basic and often useless. Towns and cities were filthy and knowledge of hygiene was nonexistent. The black death being a major complication of that era killed 2/3rds of England's population between 1348 and 1350. No one knew what caused diseases then. There was no knowledge of germs.

Peasants had been taught by the church that any illness was a punishment from the God for sinful behavior. Therefore, any illness was self-imposed. Other theories put forward for diseases included "humours". It was believed that the body had four humours (fluids in our bodies) and if these became unbalanced you became ill. Doctors studied a patient's urine to determine if there was any unbalance. Physicians were viewed as skilled people, but their work was based on a very poor knowledge of the human anatomy.

Experiments on dead bodies were unheard and strictly forbidden.

They charged for their services and only wealthy people could afford them.

Their cures were bizarre, including bleeding and the use of herbs. It had some logic to them even if it was a very "hit or miss" approach. One of the most famous physicians was John Arderne who wrote "The Art of Medicine" and who treated royalty. He was considered a master in his field. His cure for kidney stones was a hot plaster smeared with honey and pigeon poop.

Health-care operations were carried out by 'surgeons'. In fact these men were unskilled and had other jobs such as butchers and barbers.

The traditional red and white pole outside of a barbers shop today is a throwback to the days in Medieval England when barbers did operations. The red stood for blood and the white stood for the bandages used at the end of the operation. Operations could end in death as postoperative infections were common. Instruments used in an operation were not sterilised as there was no knowledge of germs, there was no need to clean instruments used in operations. Patients might recover from small operations, such as a tooth extraction (though this could not be guaranteed), but operations that included a deep cut through the skin were very dangerous.

Some monasteries had cottage hospitals attached to them. The monks who worked in these hospitals had basic medical knowledge but they were probably the best qualified people in the country to help the poor and those who could not afford their own physician.