

Medicine and herbal remedies in the 16th century

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Shakespeare, a self proclaimed poet and renowned playwright, lived in the age of the Renaissance. Shakespeare was born and lived through the medical renaissance, which was the point between 1400 and 1700 A. D. that innovated the medicines used in Europe. These treatments were eventually spread throughout the world. The most typical agreement made by medical technicians of the time believed in the body to be maintained up by a balance of bodily humors, through during the mid 1500s new methods of treatment were introduced through experimentation, however, despite these advances made by the more wealthy, the more destitute population continued to receive traditional treatment.

During the Elizabethan age, it was widely conceded that a person's temperament was decided by the state of their humors, which were sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic. This belief in humors originates in the ancient Greeks beliefs and medical foundations which were reinforced by philosophers Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates among others. Each of these humors also relates to a substance from the body and a corresponding element, blood and air, yellow bile and fire, phlegm and water, black bile and earth respectively; furthermore, these substances and humors responded to specific environments related to them. In short, the entire process breaks down as this: sanguine manifested itself in blood, and the element of air and is maintained by hot and moist conditions.

Cholera was identified with yellowed bile and the element fire, it was "environment" was hot and dry. Phlegm was more classified under the phlegmatic humor, and the element water, cold and moist. Melancholy was affiliated with black bile, earth, and a cold, dry environment. If a patient was

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thought to have an excess of a particular humor, measures would be taken to lessen that value, such as bloodletting, dietary changes and bodily purging. In Tudor England, the knowledge of humors and their use in medicine become widely acknowledged and accepted, and these humors impact on a person's temperament. Stemming from beliefs in ancient Greece, the people in that era believed that one's general mood and state of mind was affected by the overall balance of humors in their body, if a particular humor dominated then the personality it personified would become present in the individual. Elizabethan people believed that the humors give off vapors that traveled to the brain, causing a certain behavioral pattern to surface "The "humours" give off vapors which ascended to the brain; an individual's personal characteristics were explained by his or her "temperament," or the state of that person's "humours"; thus, a person with balanced humors had a balanced disposition. Cholera made one wrathful and ambitious. A phlegmatic person had characteristics that were slothful and cowardly. Finally, a person overwhelmed by melancholy was introspective, gluttonous, and saddened or pessimistic.

The most revered physician during the early medical renaissance was the ancient Greek physician and philosopher Galen who had been a prodigy in Greece and the authority on medicine up until the 1600s. Galen was responsible for theorizing the existence of humors, which became the sole base for medical practice in Europe until physicians, to the point that a surgery would not occur unless a professor was attending to read the teachings of Galen and to oversee that the surgery was performed under

those medicinal laws. Andreas Vesalius was a young anatomist that began working in the medical field under Galen's concepts and was a believer of those ideas until he became a teacher himself and began to personally dissected cadavers to observe the finer points of anatomy. After creating many incredibly detailed diagrams of the human body, Vesalius began to notice that Galen had made multiple mistakes in his charts and estimations, this was because Galen had never dissected a human body before, it was not allowed at the time.

Galen had simply been using what information he could get from animals and his patients during surgery. At the age of 25, Vesalius had set way to break away from the blind following of Galen via anything from presentations to books. Using Vesalius' new concepts of anatomy, French barber-surgeon Ambroise Paré revolutionized methods of surgery by the year 1600. While serving as a military surgeon, Paré discovered that treating a gunshot wound with soothing ointments and simple bandaging; instead, of the typical practice which involved cauterizing the wound with hot oil would usually have much better effects on the patient. After this discovery, Paré would go on to create artificial limbs and learn to tie off blood vessels during an amputation to prevent excessive blood flow, saving countless lives; however, his greatest contribution to society was his success in bringing the more lowly ranked barber-surgeons into the professional and respected world. " Barber-surgeons amputated legs and arms, pulled out teeth and stitched cuts," meanwhile, that was all the barber-surgeons were allowed to do because of their low status, before Paré's and Vesalius' successes in challenging Galenism, there was often a professor overseeing the surgery

from afar. Paré's accomplishments alone are a major factor towards how today's medicines have advanced so much in so short time.

As mentioned before, much the accomplishments of Paré and Vesalius improved the medical use in the future and their own society, the improved treatments were only known and used by the wealthy. Meanwhile, the remaining population were still receiving old methods of treatment, that date back to the medieval age. " It is thought that only about 10% of all Tudors lived to be beyond their 40th birthday - and one reason, among many, was the poor standard of Tudor medicine and medical knowledge." These treatments could include, but certainly weren't limited to: herbal mixtures from apothecaries to treat problems such as headaches or stomach pains, mixing certain insects and such that were thought to be imbued with certain properties together then applying to the area of effect to cure surface irritation, and hanging red curtains around a one's bed to assist in recovery from smallpox.

A widely used herbal antibiotic used at the time, instead, of more ludicrous methods and the high expenses thereof, was garlic " Garlic, another of those herbal prodigies, holds the promise of extraordinary therapeutic benefits, possessing nearly two dozen major medicinal properties." When consumed on a regular basis, garlic provided great improvements to the human immune system and assisted in staving offed diseases and infections that often spread in the bereft areas of England as well as the rest of Europe.

The medical renaissance ended only three hundred years ago, and since then, mankind's medical progress has been amazingly fast. Starting with

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only basic concepts of humanoid structure and anatomy using humors and basing treatments on superstitions and spiritual healing, to now, where thanks to the discoveries made in the sixteenth century in particular, surgeons retain some of the most high-class career paths available and meticulous treatment is based on tested fact. In reflection of this history in medicines, it can only be guess as what the future of medical practices may hold.