

Was medicine in
medieval times really
worse than in ancient
times



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Before we can decide whether or not the medicine in medieval times was worse or better than in Ancient times we must see what medicine was like in Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greek, Ancient Rome and Medieval times. After this we can see what time had the better medicine and general health.

All of Ancient Egypt was the first place to really take a serious logical look at medicine. They were the first true civilization; this meant that they had to look after their population. They started with similar ideas to the basic Ancient tribes; that Gods and Evil Spirits caused disease and that certain herbs, used in the right way can cure diseases but they soon developed these ideas with their own, inspired by things around them like the Nile and irrigation led to ideas about channels in the body being blocked or food rotting in the bowel spreading poisoned gas through the channels. Their leaders, and pharaohs provided no public health but the Egyptians had impeccable hygiene, they washed every day and anointed themselves with oils, they drank from clean cups and wore clean clothes daily, practiced circumcision and the priests shaved their entire bodies to prevent lice.

One problem was that their religion, which requires the body intact preserved so surgery and dissections could not be performed. Physicians used to be trained in schools this was the first time people were trained as oppose to the knowledge simply being passed down but not “taught,” these schools trained both men and women. Ancient Greece was another of the Ancient civilizations to have sprung up around the Mediterranean. Its knowledge of disease was only small the still believed that Gods and Evil Spirits caused disease but they also looked for logical explanations. The explanation they came up was that the human body was full of the four

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humours, which was similar to the Greek ideas of the four elements this was when the idea of looking for a logical answer came about. They still believed that God could cure disease but they believed that God did it with Herbs rather than just Magic.

Again like the Egyptians the Greeks had no Public health and their Hygiene was still relatively good compared to ancient tribes people. Unlike the Egyptians the Greeks Religion allowed for surgery, which greatly improved their knowledge of the interior of the body, although, their knowledge of what the body parts did remained limited. The Greeks had many schools set up by various people with the most famous and prolific of these being Hippocrates he set up the Hippocratic oath which is still in use today. It was a lot of growth from the Egyptians as more doctors were trained more logical medical ideas were introduced and observing and recording symptoms and cures started, the Greeks improved in many way on the Egyptians ideas. The Romans were the last of the Great Ancient Civilizations and the most medically advanced, it started during the decline of the Greek civilization and it has many connections with the Greeks. While continuing the ideas of the bodies four humours causing disease they also introduced the ideas of treating them by using the opposite humour, or element form of that humour like a hot chilli (fire) to cure a cold (phlegm).

They also thought that bad air or miasma could cause disease or that biting insects could cause it, so they obviously made the connection and made the logical connection. The Romans were the first to have public health services built; they had aquaducts, to bring in fresh water, public fountains, public baths and public toilets. All of these raised the public health so much more

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than just private hygiene could ever do. The Romans' religion did not allow dissection so all dissections had to be conducted in Alexandria, this meant that any dissections in Rome had to be conducted on animals this did lead to some abnormalities but these were still the most accurate dissections ever conducted.

These were conducted by Galen who was born Greek but did most of his work in Rome, Galen continued with most of Hippocrates ideas and these were all good and Galen made them practical. Galen trained many doctors these included women, which would not happen in Medieval times. Medieval times suffered a regression shortly after the collapse of the Roman Empire but they picked up again slowly rebuilding their medical knowledge until it reached and exceeded the levels of the Romans. Their knowledge of diseases had regressed greatly and even late on they believed that God caused disease this was a great step back from the ideas of Galen and Hippocrates, both looking for logical explanations. Worrying of all was that they were still using the same texts people were using in Roman times, they had not progressed at all, the church even tried to hold back progression.

Their Public health systems were a great step back from the grandeur of the Romans' Baths and Aquaducts. Their water systems went no further than private toilets, and monastery's having their own water systems. Their surgery did improve, as minor operations became more necessary because of the more wars-wounds. Caesareans came into being to deal with difficult births although these are not always successful with high infant and mother fatalities but it was better than nothing. In many ways the Medieval period did advance but in many others it did not.

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For Example they developed a basic Anaesthetic and Antiseptic, which helped treat disease but poisons were treated like cures, both lead and mercury were prescribed as cure, both deadly poisonous. In my view the Medieval period suffered hugely after the collapse of the Roman Empire, they suffered a huge low in which very little happened, they had virtually no public health and their general hygiene was disgusting. But towards the end of the era many discoveries were made and this helped to rectify the losses of knowledge from the past. As time goes on, Egyptians to Greeks, Greeks to Romans, etc.

it has slowly got better but The Medieval period interrupts this by suddenly getting worse then gradually improving so in a sense it was both worse and, at least, equal to the Romans at their height.