



The history of medicine

Challenges and successes

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Published online: 1 September 2017
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I swear by Apollo the physician, and Asclepius, and Hygeia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses as my witnesses ... (Hippocratic Oath).

Humans have been practicing medicine since the creation of the world. The early history of medical practice can be learned and interpreted from bony remains, old drawings and paintings, and surgical tools used by our ancestors. Religion, magic, and rituals were the basis of medical practice in early human society. Medicine was practiced by witches and alchemists, who used herbs, vegetables, and remedy preparations accompanied by rituals and dances [1].

When examining the practice of medicine in ancient Egypt, curious facts can be found. Preserved mummies revealed the diseases that developed in the population of that time. Tuberculosis of the bone, arthritis, bladder stones, and parasitic diseases were found in these mummies showing the epidemiologic profile of the population [1, 2].

Greek medicine also played an important role in history. Greek physicians used a method of reasoning and observations to understand the process of health and diseases. They introduced the concepts of diagnosis, prognosis, and ethics. Hippocrates of Kos (ca.

460–ca. 370 BCE), considered the father of Western medicine, left the legacy of the Hippocratic Oath that is still taken by all new physicians to this day [3–5].

Concepts of health, sickness, and death changed over the centuries among the many different cultures and the medicine practiced by trained professionals changed the approach to diseases as well as the treatment perspectives [6]. In order to understand how modern medicine got to where it is now and to make plans for the future it is important to carefully look at the past and understand its history. Written by a renowned group of physicians, this special issue offers readers important historical facts in different areas of medicine, shedding light on the challenges and successes of the “art of healing”.

Conflict of interest K. França and T. Lotti declare that they have no competing interests.

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