

Hippocrates of Cos

C. 460 – 377 B.C.



Overview

- One of the first people to believe in a proper medical study of the human body.
- Disagreed with the popular thinking of the time, which was that only the gods could cure sick people.
- Considered to be the 'father of medicine'.
- Modern doctors still take the 'Oath of Hippocrates' when they begin to practice medicine.



Common Sense Approach

- Believed disease and its treatment were entirely of this earth.
- Cast aside superstition and focused on the natural: observing, recording and analysing symptoms and passages of diseases.
- Prognosis central to approach to medicine with view of being able to avoid in the future circumstances which were perceived to have initiated the problems in the first place.



Cured by Nature

- Believed what came from nature should be cured by nature.
- Rest, healthy diet, exercise, hygiene and air were prescribed for the treatment and prevention of illness.
- “Walking is a man’s best medicine”.



The Theory of Humours

- Regarded the body as a single entity.
- Key to remaining healthy lay in preserving the natural balance within this entity.
- The four “humours” he believed influenced this equilibrium were:
 - Blood
 - Phlegm
 - Yellow bile
 - Black bile
- When present in equal quantities a healthy body would result.
- If one element became too dominant, illness or disease would take over.



Treatment

- Try to undertake activities or eat foods which would stimulate the other humours, while attempting to restrain the dominant one, in order to preserve balance, and hence, health.
- Approach may seem unscientific today but fact that he was prescribing such a natural, earthly solution was a major advancement.
- Concept and treatment of humours endured as far as the seventeenth century and some aspects as far as the nineteenth.



The Oath of Hippocrates


- Short passage constituting a code of conduct to which all physicians were obliged to pledge themselves.
- Outlines the ethical responsibilities of the doctor to his patients and a commitment to patient confidentiality.
- Attempt to set physicians in the Hippocratic tradition apart from the spiritual and superstitious healers of the day.



The Oath of Hippocrates

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THE OATH OF HIPPOCRATES



SWEAR by Apollo the physician, and Aesculapitus and Health and All-heal and all the gods and goddesses, that, according to my ability and judgement, I will keep this Oath and this stipulation -

To reckon him who taught me this Art equally dear to me as my parents, to share my substance with him and relieve his necessities if required; to look upon his offspring on the same footing as my own brothers and to teach them this art, if they shall wish to learn it, without fee or stipulation; and that by precept, lecture and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of the Art to my own sons and those of my teachers and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath according to the law of medicine, but to none others.

I will follow the system of regimen which, according to my ability and judgement, I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion. With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practice my Art. I will not cut persons laboring under the stone, but will leave this to be done by men who are practitioners of this work.

Into whatever houses I enter, I will go into them for the benefit of the sick and will abstain from every voluntary act of mischief and corruption; and, further from the seduction of females or males, of freemen and slaves.

Whatever, in connection with my professional practice or not, in connection with it, I see or hear, in the life of men, which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge, as reckoning that all such should be kept secret.

While I continue to keep this Oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times! But should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot.



Legacy of Hippocrates

- Before time of Hippocrates there had been virtually no science in medicine.
- Disease believed to be punishment of the gods.
- Divine intervention came not from the natural, but the supernatural.
- Therefore only treat come from the supernatural.
- Hippocrates confronted this notion head on.
- His approach brought the rational to the previously irrational.
- “There are in fact two things, science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter ignorance.”

