

GCSE HISTORY: Medicine Through Time

Oriental and Islamic Medicine

Background Information

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Organisation of medicine

The Islamic Authorities placed a lot of value in medicine. Baghdad had a hospital by AD 850 and doctors had to pass medical examinations by AD 931 in order to practice. Hospitals were later developed throughout the Islamic world, with the most famous being those in Damascus and Cairo.

Causes of Disease

At the time of Muhammad people in Arabia believed that evil spirits caused diseases. Through reading the works of Hippocrates and Galen they realised that this was not the case and adopted many of the theories suggested by these men such as the theory of the Four Humours.

Developments of Galen and Hippocrates theories

Rhazes said that it was vitally important to observe patients and make notes of all minor details. He was the first man to observe and record the differences between smallpox and measles.

Avicenna wrote the Canon of medicine (still used as a reference book today). This developed some of Galen's ideas and was used with aspiring doctors in both Arabia and later in the West.

Surgery

Albucasis said that surgeons should only perform surgery when they were sure of the cause of the pain. He was also insistant that the surgeons should plan what they intended to do prior to surgery. He also emphasised the need to ignore personal gain (surgeons could become very wealthy from performing pointless operations).

Anatomy

Islamic law prevented the dissection of bodies. Only Ibn an-Nafis made any real progress, stating that Galen was wrong to say that blood did not pass through the Septum.

Chemistry

Arabian doctors and chemists invented distillation and sublimation. They also developed the use of drugs such as senna, musk and camphor.

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