

# SUBJECT: History

## UNIT: Health through Time: Middle Ages



### Beliefs about disease: Unknown

- **Religion**- God sent illness as a punishment
- **Superstition**- Evil spirits caused headaches, planets affected health
- **Natural**- Imbalance of Four Humours
- **Miasma**- poisonous air/bad smells caused illness

### FACTORS

Government  
Chance  
Religion  
War  
Individuals  
Science & technology  
Communication

### What could a Medieval doctor do?

- **Trained doctors**- trained for 7 years from books. Taught incorrect methods.
- **Barber surgeons**- barbers who would cut off limbs for the right price. Not trained
- **Wise women**- oldest woman in village who might know from witnessing illness or herbal remedies
- **Blood letting**- using leeches or cut to balance four humours
- **Natural remedies**- purging (vomit), herbal remedies, Galen's treatment of opposites
- **Supernatural**- Pray, astronomy

### Hippocrates & Galen

**Hippocrates**- Body made up of Four Humours (blood, phlegm, black bile, yellow bile) illness when imbalanced. Also believed in clinical observation and diagnosis. Impact- Hippocratic Oath (to observe symptoms)-still give today by doctors

**Galen**- Built on Hippocrates theory of Four Humours with treatment of opposites. Studied anatomy by dissecting animals. Incorrectly believed liver produced blood and humans have 2 jaw bones. Impact- methods taught in universities for hundreds of years.

Both ideas championed by Christian Church



### Surgery (BIP)

- **Problems**- **Blood loss, Infection, Pain** so surgery had to be done quickly and simple external operations
- **Blood loss**- wounds cauterised, no way to prevent
- **Infection**- tools were not cleaned, used on multiple patients. Hugh of Lucca put wine on bandages
- **Pain**- No real anaesthetics other than opium (issues with dosage) alcohol caused blood loss

### Impact of Christianity

- Catholic Church had huge control over health and hindered development.
- Controlled education- monks copied only approved books like Hippocrates and Galen. No-one was allowed to challenge their ideas even if incorrect
- Belief illness sent by God so could not be treated or going against God's will
- Hospitals ran by Church- 'care not cure'
- Hospitals for mental illness like Bedlam and Lazar for infectious disease- no treatments

### Public Health

- Towns crowded and dirty
- Water from streams, rivers- dirty
- Sewerage- open sewers in streets, toilet waste into rivers. Shared public toilets
- No rubbish collection
- Any government rules at local level

### Islamic influence

- Belief in seeking treatments. 'For every disease Allah has given a cure'
- Mental illness treated with compassion
- Hospitals treated patients with trained doctors

**Avicenna (980-1037)**- Wrote a great encyclopaedia of ancient Greek and Islamic medicine known as Canon of Medicine. Listed the medical properties of 760 different drugs- became standard European textbook until 17<sup>th</sup> century

**Rhazes (c865-c925)**- Distinguished measles from smallpox for the first time. Wrote over 150 books. Followed Galen, but was critical; one of his books was called Doubts by Galen

### Black Death 1347

**CAUSES**- Perceived causes- God, Jews poisoned well, miasma. Actual causes- lice on rats

**TREATMENTS**- pray, burn candles, chicken bottoms, quarantine, sweep streets

**IMPACT**- **Social**- 1/3 population killed. **Economic**- initially peasants paid more, Statute of Labourers 1351- paid pre plague. Poll Tax  
**Political**- End to feudalism. Peasants Revolt