

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT THROUGH TIME

- Maz Diagnosis and medical treatment in history – what do you think about this?
Chaz Doctors didn't cure anything until the Second World War.
Maz You can't be serious! What about all those herbal cures and stuff like that?
Chaz I know that all kinds of natural healing substances have been used throughout history. The Roman Army doctor Dioscorides wrote a *Herbarium* which was used for the next millennium with some 600 herbal cures. And in 1653, Nicholas Culpepper's *Complete Herbal* assembled even more healing substances, including newly-discovered things from the New World like tobacco – which he touted as a wonder-cure which would stop toothache, cure snake bites and kill lice. I don't deny those. I just don't think they count as medicine.
- Maz What do you mean?
Chaz I don't think discovering that a substance has mildly-curative side-effects is medicine. And what you need to realise is that, as late as 1910, a home medicine encyclopaedia was still recommending electric shocks, animal hormones, and a range of naturally occurring substances including cocaine, mercury, creosote and strychnine, as cures! So do you see what I mean – even doctors who knew about the germ theory, still couldn't do anything to cure people, because they didn't know how to kill germs.
- Maz So all medicine before penicillin is a sham?
Chaz I have another theory. Take the Egyptians – what was new about their civilisation? Observation and irrigation, so that's their medicine. They observe the patient and then whatever's wrong with them, they declare that the best cure is to use bleeding and purging to unblock the channels.
- Maz Go on...
Chaz And what did the Greeks develop? Philosophy ... rationalisation ...they said that the world has four elements. So they developed a medicine which says the body has four humours and you get ill when the humours are out of balance. And then they try to heal everything by rebalancing the humours by purging and bleeding.
- Maz But that's the same as the Egyptians.
Chaz No, it isn't. The Egyptians were purging and bleeding to unblock the channels – the Greeks were doing it to rebalance the humours. Then there's the Romans who were more concerned with winning wars and keeping the army healthy...
- Maz ... so they developed their public health provisions.
Chaz Precisely.
Maz And medieval civilisation fell into superstition and chaos...
Chaz ... so their practice of medicine was chaos and superstition too. Do you see how it works?
- Maz But what about after the Renaissance – when Darwin and Pasteur discovered how life and disease *really* worked. Why didn't they find a cure for disease then?
- Chaz Their medicine became very scientific in its approach – remember that Paré experiment where he gave bezoar to a prisoner to see if it cured poisoning – and in the 19th century they used all kinds of 'modern' developments which they were convinced would cure illness, such as electric shocks, and phrenology, and mesmerism. But you've got to see these things for what they are. They're not cures, they're desperation.
- Maz A bit like religion?
Chaz Absolutely. People have prayed throughout history because they couldn't cure disease. When all else fails, turn to God.

Maz But you're saying that it's only after the Second World War and the mass-production of penicillin that doctors have a weapon which specifically and intentionally defeats disease.

Chaz Exactly.

Maz But don't forget about those things like anti-histamines and vitamins. Doctors discovered how to cure vitamin deficiency diseases such as rickets and pellagra before the First World War. And hormone treatments – things like insulin; Banting and Best discovered insulin in the 1920s. We can even change a person's gender nowadays with hormones.

Chaz Point taken, I suppose I'm concentrating on bacterial infection.

Chaz Also, we need to remember that antibiotics don't cure viruses, and recently as a result of the misuse of antibiotics and people not finishing their courses of treatment and things like that, more and more bacteria such as TB and MRSA are developing immunity to antibiotics.

Maz So, antibiotics are by no means the final victory in our battle against disease, and germs are making a comeback. There's a danger that people in the future will look back on our time as a golden era when, for a brief period of 50 years or so, doctors could actually cure diseases.