

Knowledge Organiser: Renaissance Medicine (c1500-c1700)

People who fell ill during the Renaissance period were likely to believe the same things about the cause of their illness as their medieval ancestors. Very little really changed in the practice of medicine during this period. However, new ideas were slowly breaking down old beliefs and rethinking the way the world worked.

Summarise your learning

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| Causes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An imbalance of the humours – e.g. King Charles II had blood removed and was purged Theory of Miasma (bad smells) Person to person contact – Great Plague Thomas Sydenham believed that different diseases had different causes. He identified a new disease – St Vitus Dance. He said that ‘atmospheres’ could affect your humours and make you ill. |
| Diagnosis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More direct observations and examinations of patients (Sydenham recorded symptoms in detail) Less use of urine/astrology charts |
| Prevention | <p>Superstitious/religious methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living a good Christian life – prayer, going to church <p>Logical methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blood-letting More emphasis on removing miasma through removing sewage and rubbish Healthy living and keeping clean <p>Response to Great Plague – Quarantine, closing pubs and theatres, burying dead at night</p> |
| Treatments | <p>Superstitious/religious methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prayer and fasting Superstition – e.g. a magpie’s beak around your neck to cure toothache <p>Logical methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blood-letting and purging Traditional herbal remedies New herbal remedies from other countries such as Peruvian tree |

| Chronology: what happened on these dates? | |
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| 1440 | Johannes Gutenberg creates the world’s first printing press. |
| 1536 | The dissolution of the monasteries in England dramatically changed the availability of hospital care. |
| 1543 | Vesalius published <i>On the Fabric of the Human Body</i> . |
| 1662 | The Royal Society received its royal charter from Charles II, who had taken a keen interest in science. |
| 1665 | Outbreak of the Great Plague, which peaked in September when 7,000 deaths from the disease were recorded in one week. |

| Who were these people? | |
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| Thomas Sydenham | Sydenham refused to rely on medical books when diagnosing a patient’s illness. Instead, he made a point of closely observing the symptoms and treating the disease causing them. |
| Andreas Vesalius | Vesalius noted that Galen had made some errors in his original theory on the human body. He put this down to the fact that Galen dissected animals instead of people. In all Vesalius found 300 mistakes in Galen’s original work on anatomy – e.g. the human lower jaw was in one part, not two. Vesalius also encouraged other doctors to base their work on dissection. |
| William Harvey | Harvey suggested that blood circulated around the body instead of being made in the liver, as taught by Galen. His theory was that blood must pass from arteries to veins through tiny passages that were invisible to the naked eye. Harvey proved that the heart acted as a pump. |
| Royal Society | Its aim was to promote and carry out experiments to further the understanding of science. They also heavily promoted the sharing of scientific knowledge and encouraged argument over new theories. |

| Change and Continuity | |
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| Change | Continuity |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church had less control over medicine as they lost their power in the Reformation. Fewer people believed in supernatural causes of disease The Printing Press – allowed copies of medical texts to be printed quickly and shared knowledge. Diagnosis – more based on direct observation of patients The Royal Society Greater government action – quarantine Ideas – Vesalius – corrected Galen on the anatomy of the body - and Harvey – proved the circulation of the blood The Royal Society was set up to further scientific understanding – it sponsored scientists to carry out research and make new discoveries, and published a journal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theory of Four Humours Theory of Miasma Superstition Prayer and fasting Ideas were slow to change despite key new discoveries so there was little actual change in medical treatment. |

| Vocabulary: define these words | |
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| Renaissance | A French word that means rebirth. New ideas were beginning to influence medicine. |
| Humanism | A renewed love of learning and scholarship. |
| Dissection | The process of cutting apart or separating tissue. |
| Anatomy | A study of the structure or internal workings of the body. |
| Circulatory System | The system that circulates blood through the body, consisting of the heart and blood vessels. |
| Printing Press | A machine for printing text or pictures. It had movable letters so that many copies of the same text could be printed. |
| Royal Society | An influential group of scientists formed in 1660. Its members shared experimnts and promoted scientific ideas. It was given a Royal Charter by Charles II in 1662 which gave them more credibility. |
| Reformation | Henry VIII split from the Catholic Church in 1533 and created the Church of England. In 1536, he dissolved religious institutions, such as monasteries and convents, and confiscated their land. This reduced the Church’s influence over medical ideas and treatment. |
| Alchemy | This was an early form of chemistry. Alchemists tried to turn one material into another: mostly, they were trying to discover a way of making gold. |
| Transference | The theory that disease could be transferred to something else. |
| Quack | Somebody who did not have any medical qualifications, but who sold their services as a doctor or apothecary. |

