*This podcast helps you to understand continuity in approaches to prevention, treatment and care in the community and in hospitals.*

**Welcome to our interview with Professor Michaels, a respected historian on all things Renaissance! Many historians say that Renaissance medicine changed radically from the Middle Ages. Do you agree?**

Well, I have to say I don’t agree. Much remained the same regarding the type of people that treated the sick, and the kind of training that these people received. Physicians still trained extensively in universities. While some, such as Thomas Sydenham, encouraged significant developments, most doctors still learned that Galan’s Theory of the Four Humours was accurate, and were still prohibited from performing dissections on humans.

**Well, what about surgeons, apothecaries and other people who cared for the sick?**

The large majority of people were still cared for by members of their family, usually women, who passed down their treatments through the generations. If the disease or injury was severe, a patient might use the services of the experienced local surgeon or apothecary just like in the Middle Ages.

**But surely hospitals had changed a lot by the Renaissance period?**

Actually, they didn’t. While the hospitals changed hands from monasteries to town councils, they remained a place for the care of the poor and the elderly, rather than the sick. For the majority of people, the care they received when they were sick came from their closest family and their local community. Does all this sound familiar? Well, that’s because this situation was very similar to that of the medieval period.

**Okay, so did treatments change during the Renaissance?**

There were lots of similarities. Herbal remedies were still widely used to cure disease. Furthermore, because physicians still learned the Theory of the Four Humours as part of their training, they continued to recommend bleeding and vomiting as a way of treating certain types of disease. People also continued to believe that God had the power to cure sickness. Even though hundreds of years had passed, the treatment of people with disease and injuries in the Renaissance period remained very similar to that of the Middle Ages. However, this isn’t the whole picture. You must balance these facts with information about how prevention and treatment of disease did undergo change.

**Thank you for your insight, Professor Michaels.**

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*This podcast helps you to understand how people dealt with the Great Plague in London, 1665 – approaches to treatment and attempts to prevent its spread.*

**Questioner:** This quiz is designed to test your knowledge of the Great Plague in 1665. Are you ready?

**Interviewee:** I’m ready!

**Questioner:** Name three dates when London was ravaged by plague.

**Interviewee:** 1603, 1625 and 1665.

**Questioner:** How many died in 1665?

**Interviewee:** 75,000 people.

**Questioner:** What did people believe caused the plague?

**Interviewee:** Same as in the Middle Ages; God’s punishment, miasma and the movement of the planets.

**Questioner:** How were the victims of the plague treated?

**Interviewee:** Well, they were given religious charms to wear, prayed to God to ask him to care for the sick, and some people bought herbal remedies, which claimed to cure the disease. Some doctors advised bleeding and purging, and some people lanced the buboes to let the pus out.

**Questioner:** Excellent. What did people do to avoid catching the plague?

**Interviewee:** Because people believed that miasma caused the plague, they used strong-smelling herbs to ward off the bad smells. They put these herbs in doorways and windows, and held them under their noses. Many people chewed or smoked tobacco for its strong smell to combat the disease. People generally just avoided contact with one another.

**Questioner:** Very good. Then, tell me about the King – what did his government try to do to help the people of London?

**Interviewee:** People believed that God caused the plague as a punishment. The King ordered entire days to be dedicated to fasting and confession of sins, to beg for God’s forgiveness. The Mayor of London also tried to prevent the plague spreading by banning dirty animals like pigs and dogs from inside the city walls. He also ordered for victims and their families to be locked in their homes to stop them spreading the disease, and he demanded that every household wash the area outside their homes to prevent dirt building up.

**Questioner:** For a bonus point, can you explain why these were so difficult to enforce?

**Interviewee:** Well, the King and his government were self-centred and paid very little attention to the needs of their people. They just deserted London and left everyone to it. When they met to discuss the plague, they mainly focused on the King’s safety and not the safety of his people! Plus, many people simply ignored these rules and there was no sufficient enforcement.

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*This podcast helps you to understand change in care and treatment: improvements in medical training and the influence in England of the work of Vesalius.*

The word ‘Renaissance’ means ‘re-birth’, which is a good way to remember the key developments of the period. During this time, people started to look again at the work of Galen and Hippocrates, and realised that the Greeks and Romans loved asking questions and experimenting with new ideas. So, during the Renaissance period, people began to reassess the old theories on medicine and health – and many argue that this is why there were significant improvements during this time. Medical training is an area that underwent substantial change. Although most physicians still trained for many years in hospitals, learning the well-established theories of Galen and Hippocrates, some doctors did undertake more advanced forms of training. From the late 1600s, some doctors could work on real hospital wards, observing patients’ symptoms and experimenting with new treatments. Doctors were also able to dissect bodies as part of their training, and could use new inventions such as microscopes and thermometers to improve their observations and diagnoses. The trainee doctors also began to study the theories of new thinkers.

These included the ideas of Andreas Vesalius, a Professor of Surgery in Padua in Italy. Vesalius published a book called *The Fabric of the Human Body* in 1543, which contained detailed and accurate illustrations of human anatomy. He also proved – through dissection of bodies – that Galen had made some mistakes. For example, he proved that blood did not flow through invisible holes in the septum of the heart, something which doctors had believed for hundreds of years. Vesalius’ book was used to train doctors in universities in England, giving them a much better understanding of anatomy and encouraged doctors to perform their own dissections. This helped to improve medical training, which in turn meant that patients received more effective treatment from their physicians.

Learning about the changes to medical training and the influence of Vesalius helps us to understand that Renaissance medicine did not remain static. In fact, there were some substantial developments. How, then, should you judge the Renaissance period? Is it a time of change or one of continuity?

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*This podcast helps you to understand continuity and change in explanations of the cause of disease and illness, a scientific approach, including the work of Thomas Sydenham in improving diagnosis, the influence of the printing press, and the work of the Royal Society on the transmission of ideas.*

Some historians argue that by 1700 medicine was still largely the same as it was in the Middle Ages. There is a great deal of evidence to support this point of view. A good example of this is how the ideas about the causes of the plague persisted. Still, in the 15 and 1600s, people believed that God caused the plague as a way of punishing people for their sins. They also believed that dirt and bad smells triggered the plague, which was supported by the fact there were more deaths in the dirtiest, most poverty-stricken and most overcrowded areas of towns. As you know, ideas about the causes of disease link closely to the way people treated them. The treatments for the plague continued just as they had done with the Black Death in the 1300s, including the use of religious charms and prayer as a means of treating the symptoms.

However, despite old ideas persisting, medical communities in the Renaissance period made quite a bit of progress in improving people’s health and wellbeing. One example of this is the physician Thomas Sydenham. He emphasised the importance of observing the patient and taking a full history of their past health, in order to diagnose their symptoms. Sydenham also stressed the importance of making a careful record of the illness as it progressed, and he used these to begin writing detailed descriptions of illnesses – including the first description of scarlet fever. These helped progress medicine as they allowed other doctors to recognise and accurately diagnose the symptoms presented by their patients.

The Royal Society was also founded. They met from 1645 to discuss the newest scientific ideas. The society published books and demonstrated scientific experiments which promoted the spread of new theories and discoveries. For example, the first experimental blood transfusion was demonstrated by a Society member.

And finally, the wider use of the printing press also encouraged progress in Renaissance, as it allowed new medical ideas to be written down and circulated widely amongst European physicians. Therefore, many historians agree that the period from 1500 to 1700s was a period of progress in medical theory. How far do you agree?

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*This podcast helps you to understand the work of a key individual, William Harvey, and the discovery of the circulation of the blood.*

**Questioner:** This quiz is designed to test what you know about the work of a significant person in the history of medicine. Not Hippocrates, not Vesalius but the physician William Harvey. My first question: When was Harvey born?

**Interviewee:** 1578

**Questioner:** What did Harvey discover?

**Interviewee:** That Galen’s ideas were wrong, that blood circulates around the body, and that the heart acts a pump.

**Questioner:** What was the name of Harvey’s book, and when was it published?

**Interviewee:** An anatomical account of the Motion of the Heart and Blood… 1628, I think?

**Questioner:** Excellent detailed knowledge! How did Harvey come to develop these ideas?

**Interviewee:** Well, Harvey was innovative. He dissected human bodies, which meant he could understand how the heart worked by examining it closely. He also dissected live cold-blooded animals. It sounds horrible, but because their hearts beat so slowly, Harvey could see the movement of individual muscles in the heart.

**Questioner:** Right. What else did Harvey do on the path to these important discoveries?

**Interviewee:** Oh yes, that’s right, he proved that the veins can only transport blood in one direction. Oh and he also proved that the same blood is moving around the body over and over, instead of being burned up, which is what Galen said happened.

**Questioner:** Excellent. So, was this accepted medical practice straight away?

**Interviewee:** Actually no. It took a long time for other physicians to accept Harvey’s ideas.

**Questioner:** What factors helped Harvey make his discovery?

**Interviewee:** Some people say that this was Harvey’s genius, that he was just thorough and determined. But I think the fact that Harvey could read the work of earlier doctors meant that he could build on their ideas. Also, Harvey was inspired by the scientific ideas of the time, like the notion that you should do careful experiments, and the fact that people were beginning to question old ideas.

**Questioner:** Did Harvey’s discovery make an impact on medicine?

**Interviewee:** Definitely! Okay yes, it did take a long time for his idea to be accepted… But the fact that physicians and surgeons could understand the way that blood worked meant that surgical theories could also make progress. The fact that dissections helped him form his ideas meant that dissections started to be used more commonly.

**Questioner:** I see, I see, you are very passionate. Your knowledge of Harvey’s work is excellent, well done. Keep it up!

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