

Nursing in Ancient Greece

Care of the sick in the period of ancient Greece had a considerable influence on the development of treatment and nursing in European countries. The peak period of care for the sick can be recorded in the period 5-3. century BC. The roots of caring for the sick have their origins in rich Greek mythology to a large extent.

Asklepios

Asclepius (12th century BC) was considered the **god of medicine**. He could cure all diseases and raise the dead, and since no one was dying, Zeus killed him with a lightning bolt. In myth, he was associated with the god Apollo, who gave his son Asclepius to be raised by the Centaur Cheiron, from whom Asclepius learned the art of medicine. Asclepius' sons Machaon and Podaleiris were famous physicians of the Achaeans before Troy. His daughter was the goddess of health Hygieia. His daughters Hygieia, Meditrine and Panakeia symbolized the different aspects of health: purity, healing and healing. The son of Telesforos represented the powers of healing.

He is usually depicted as a bearded man with a dog and a staff wrapped around a snake. One snake symbolizes one path to healing. This symbol can still be found today at doctors, pharmacies and hospitals.

Asklepios established shelters for the sick - **asklepiions** - at some temples. Here the sick were treated. Upon arrival, the sick person was bathed, anointed, then allowed to enter the long colonnade called the **abaton**. Careful attention was paid to sleep, baths, body massages, physical exercises. The patients also followed a diet. Attention was paid to psychological treatment, which consisted of listening to songs or attending a theater performance. **Theaters** were also part of the temples. Asklepiiones were built in beautiful nature, where there were natural water springs. The care was therefore more reminiscent of balneological care.

The treatment of the sick was in the hands of privileged **priests**. It consisted in a suggestive effect on the sick, who were supposed to believe in the healing power of Asklepios. Asklepios appeared in dreams to the sick during their sleep. He either healed the sick or gave him advice on what to do to get rid of his ailments.

Hippocrates

Hippocrates (460–377 BC) was **the greatest physician** of ancient Greek culture and the founder of scientific medicine. He was born on the island of Kos. He lived at a time when science and art flourished in Ancient Greece. There is a decline in the influence of the cult in medicine. The progress of scientific medical thought finds support in two schools existing on the island of Kos and Knidos. The Knid school preferred to focus attention only on the disease, it did not pay attention to the person. It was less successful than Kósk. Hippocrates left school in Kos. His father, Heraclitus, taught the art of medicine here. Fenaret's mother was a midwife.

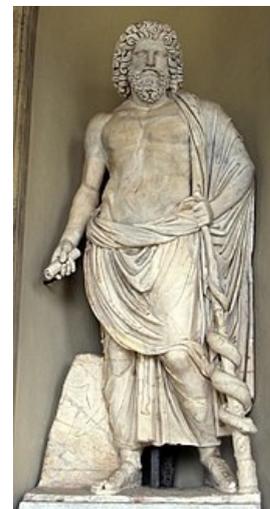
With his concept of medicine, he **rejected mystical, religious and non-scientific ideas** about man and health. He did not look for the cause in supernatural forces, but in **internal** – humoral conditions. human life and in **external** conditions – in the influences of the environment. He emphasized correct diagnosis, individual treatment and an individual approach to the patient. The whole person needs to be treated, not just the disease.

According to Hippocrates, four basic juices work in the body - **phlegm, blood, yellow bile, black bile**, which determine a person's temperament. The juices are constantly replenished with food. It must be in balance both qualitatively and quantitatively. When they are out of balance and flood the brain, mental and other disorders arise. The care of the patient then consists in **removing the excess amount of juice**, which consisted in injecting it into a vein, administering laxatives or purgative preparations. Laxatives included *watermelon, cabbage, castor*. Diuretics included *parsley, fennel, celery, asparagus, garlic, onions*.

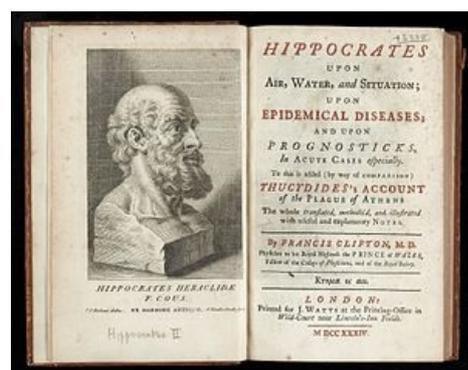
Soporific substances were roll, mandrake, dried poppy juice (opium = Greek juice). In addition, opium was used in smoke ceremonies in temples, but also as an intoxicant during orgies and drinking parties.

Galénos (a Greek physician working in Rome) later considered *opium* to be the most powerful medicine, but it could pose a significant danger to the patient. Can cause death in overdose. Another treatment he preferred was exercise, swinging on a hanging bed and walking - all of which helped to calm the mind.

Hippocrates described **delirious states** and **memory disorders** during tuberculosis, malaria, dysentery. Other ways of caring for the sick were the use of **warm wraps**, which were supposed to induce sweating. Wraps were prepared from barley flour with wine and oil.



Asklépios



Busta znázorňující Hippokrata a titulní strana jeho práce

After the death of Hippocrates, there was stagnation in the state for about 300 years , but also in medicine and the care of the sick. Medicine was exclusively practiced by men. Women volunteered as midwives. In Greece, it mattered whether a boy or a girl was born. The Greeks were great warriors, so they were interested in having enough boys, a girl was not so desirable. Postponing female newborns or even killing them was a common procedure performed by midwives. Available sources do not provide any evidence of nurses other than midwives.

Hygiene in cities

Similar to other ancient civilizations, communal hygiene was not at **a high level** everywhere. Greek cities did not have waterworks and water supply systems were few and far between. Sewage is poured onto the street from windows or doors into an open drain in the middle of the street. Sewage with underground pipes begins to appear gradually from the 5th to the 2nd century BC. Latrines did not exist for a long time. Potties were used, which spilled onto the street or into nature. Epidemics were not uncommon in ancient Greece.

Personal hygiene

It was possible to bathe in the numerous **fountains**, but it was not allowed to bathe in the water reservoirs (prevention of infection). In the 6th century, bathing in a fountain was common, in the 5th century it was exceptional, because people preferred to bathe at home. **The bathrooms** were modest, but they were equipped with sinks for bathing the feet. Other basins, on high legs, were intended for washing hands. The obligation to wash hands before eating was commonplace in Greece.

Buildings of public **baths** were developed especially in the 4th century BC. Because the baths were heated, poor people stayed here to warm up. Some halls were reserved for women only. However, Greek baths cannot be compared to Roman thermal baths. The ancient Greeks did not know soap. Some rubbed themselves with sand, the Athenians used soda instead of soap.

Food

The Greeks ate **three times a day**. Breakfast was light, lunch was simple and light. The most carefully prepared meal was dinner. The usual menu was vegetarian and modest - lots of fruit, legumes, cheese and other dairy products. Commoners ate little meat because, apart from pork, it was an expensive food. More fish meat was eaten than mammal meat. The Greeks did not have much patience for lavish feasts. They had neither the means nor much appetite for it. The only luxury used to be wine.

Links

Related Articles

- History of Nursing
- History of nursing/Prehistoric times
- History of nursing/Antiquity
- History of nursing/Middle ages
- History of nursing/19th Century

External Links

- History of nursing (Czech) (<https://mefanet.lfp.cuni.cz/clanky.php?aid=17>)

Bibliography

- BUTINOVÁ, A.. *Řecko 776 až 338 př. n. l.*. 1. edition. Praha : Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2002. ISBN 80-7106-566-8.
- ŠWIDERKOVÁ, A. *Tvář helénistického světa*. 1. edition. Praha : Panorama, 1983.