

Nursing in ancient Rome

Until the arrival of Greek doctors in Rome in the 2nd century B.C. the care of the sick had a non-scientific character. The Romans were mainly concerned with *military, political and construction problems*. They did not allow themselves to worry about the sick. Therefore, care for the sick was not at the same level as in other ancient civilizations. Many foreign doctors worked in Rome, first from Greece, later also from Alexandria. Some of them were prisoners of war. It wasn't until the first century AD that Rome began to devote itself to the care of sick citizens. Until the arrival of the first Greek doctors, the Romans explained the cause of diseases in terms of the "wrath of God". Therefore, the care of the sick consisted in propitiating the gods with religious ceremonies, sacrifices and prayers.

The Romans founded *hospitals - valetudinaria* (from the Latin *valetudo* = health). At first they were intended for slaves, later for sick residents and wounded soldiers.

In Rome, as in Greece, women were employed only as midwives. **Galénos** proves the existence of a kind of Origine who was able to prepare medicines against coughs and stomach problems. According to *Soranus*, a Roman physician, a midwife should be a literate, spirited, hardworking, honorable woman without sensory defects. She was supposed to have healthy limbs, a strong body and long slender fingers with short nails. The nature of the midwife is calm, without prejudice, she should not be greedy for money, so that she does not provide substances that cause abortion for money.

Caring for Soldiers

For their constant military conquests, the Romans (as well as other civilizations) had to develop the perfect care for wounded soldiers. Military infirmaries were established. There was also a *spa* with an elaborate sewage system. In battles, several doctors and wound healers were always available to help the wounded immediately.

Hygiene

Communal hygiene and body care were of a much higher standard than in Greece. **Plumbing, bathroom and sewage** were in almost every house. The *Laws of the Twelve Tablets* (valid since the 5th century BC) paid attention to the burial of dead bodies, forbade burial within the city, the mentally ill should have a guardian, and ordered caesarean section for a deceased mother.

At the beginning of the 3rd century AD, the first "spa" was founded.

It is possible to date the early beginnings of *quarantine* to the 3rd century BC, when plague patients were separated from the healthy to prevent the spread of the disease. Later, a *leprosalia* was founded for patients with leprosy.

Asclepiades

The first really successful physician in Rome was **Asclepiades (124-56 BC), (124-40 BC)**. He was a highly educated Greek physician who studied in Alexandria and Athens. He came to Rome no later than 91 BC. His medical methods were successful and, above all, pleasant, which is why he soon gained fame. He rejected the Hippocratic humoral theory and was a supporter of Epicurus' philosophy and Democritus' doctrine of atomism. Asclepiades combined their philosophical views with his professional knowledge and claimed that a healthy person is conditioned by the constant movement of solid material particles of atoms, of which the body is composed. In his care for the sick, he focuses on sweating, washing and bathing. *He was an adherent of public baths and physical exercises. He refused IVs when caring for the mentally ill. He preferred showers, bathing, massages, exercise, swinging on a suspended bed, constant employment of the patient, change of lifestyle, and diet tests. His medical motto was citó, tutó, iucunde - quickly, safely/certainly, pleasantly. Asclepiades also promoted the healing effects of wine and emphasized sufficient recovery. He taught that a good doctor should be able to promptly determine two or three types of medicine for any disease. He was also said to be a skilled surgeon, which is evidenced by the fact that his followers were credited with performing the first tracheotomy (the opening of the trachea performed in case of obstruction of the upper airways).*

Galénos

Galénos (130-200 AD) was a physician from Greece. He was born in Pergamum (today Bergama in Turkey). He served as the court physician of Marcus Aurelius. He was **the most famous Roman physician**. It is said that he was a contradictory personality - unpopular with his colleagues, conceited of his fame and greedy. But Galénos was also very far-sighted, clever and hard-working. He wrote 600 treatises, from which medieval medicine drew. He advocated natural therapy, i.e. **healing based on the theory of opposites** - for example, applying cold compresses for fever.

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References

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