

Preserving best practice: the origins of education in wound care

REFERENCES

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The documentation of treatment modalities and wound care practices is, to modern eyes, an integral part of the delivery and continuation of medical care – the importance of which is scarcely given a second thought. The wealth and accessibility of published evidence is staggering, and the majority of the various compendia of wound care text books remain highly relevant and oft-consulted. Education is rightly put on a pedestal, and the popularity of documents such as the *Wounds UK Made Easy series* are testament to the growing thirst for knowledge and best practice guidelines within the wound care community.

Did the medical establishment just collectively take it upon itself to record practices for the betterment of society and future practitioners, or were certain individuals responsible for ensuring that knowledge was recorded, be it of their own initiative, or for posterity? The question of dissemination is also of note, as it largely constitutes the early form of education; the structured sharing of prevailing (though not always accurate!) knowledge.

Within pre-state peoples, such as the Ancient Peruvians and Maasai in Kenya, the administering and recording of medical treatments was reserved to certain individuals within the tribe, typically the shaman (Forrest, 1982). The advent of nation states did much to herald a new age of medical practice, observation, and documentation; the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans were instrumental in what we take for granted today, though the details need some elucidation.

The Ancient Egyptians recorded evidence of their medical practices, notably through documents such as the Edwin Smith (1650 BC) and Ebers (1550 BC) papyri, incidentally the latter of which describes use of honey in topical treatments (Bhattacharya, 2012). Their knowledge and mastery of bandaging are of course famous, but the question remains whether they documented their practices for the purposes of education, or purely through cultural tradition.

The Ancient Greek civilisation is of course

famous for its philosophers and medics, notably Hippocrates (460–377 BC), who was one of numerous Greek physicians instrumental in the advancement of medicine for centuries to come. Even though the unwillingness to challenge prevailing thought lead to the predominance of the four humours theory for hundreds of years, Hippocrates cannot be faulted for that, and his approach of observation, documentation, and dissemination is still relevant today.

It has been observed that until the Greek settlement of Rome circa 200 BC, the Romans had no medical tradition or physicians, thus Greek was preponderant as the language of medical learning from the 5th century BC to the 5th century AD (Forrest, 1982). The adoption of Greek practices in Rome, and the subsequent expansion of the Roman Empire, meant that a rapidly advancing body of knowledge was inaccessible to those not versed in Greek. Thus, the encyclopaedists arrived, henceforth rendering Latin a language of science, and resulting in the ever-increasing wealth of medical knowledge being made available to a hugely expanded audience.

The foremost of these encyclopaedists was of course Aulus Cornelius Celsus (c. 25 BC–c. AD 50), whose only surviving work *De Medicina* covered a full gamut of medical fields, including notable contributions to dermatosyphilology which still bear his name today (kerion celsi, area celsi) (Rosenthal, 1961). He also observed the distinction between wounds and chronic ulcers, and the need for different methods of treatment (Forrest, 1982). All this in AD 50! Whilst Celsus is generally regarded to have at least witnessed procedures (though not actually having been a practicing physician), his contemporary Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) compiled a 37 book magnum opus *Historia Naturalis*, which was in its entirety a compilation of the works of others. What reason to create such a compendium, if not for the education of others?

As ever, there are lessons to be learned from the ancients, and this time, it is of the need for, and importance of, education itself.

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