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HISTORY OF MEDICINE SERIES

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BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF HISTORY OF MEDICINE SUBJECTS

HIPPOCRATES c 460–377 BC

Greek physician, the father of medicine, he was a careful, observant physician and a strong believer in surgery. The presence of disease he believed was due to a wrong proportion in the body of humours which he classified as phlegm, blood and black and yellow bile; this doctrine dominated medicine until the 18th century. To him is ascribed the authorship of the Hippocratic Oath, the earliest and most impressive statement on medical ethics.

WILLEM RÖELL 1700–1775

A talented Dutch professor of anatomy and surgery, Röell was much praised by his contemporaries for his zeal and skill at the operating table. At the age of only 25 he was awarded a doctorate for his dissertation on the structure and muscular activity of the ventricle. A modern copy of the original Cornelius Froot painting of this scene, which hangs in the Amsterdam Rijkmuseum, may be seen at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.

LAVOISIER 1743–1794

Author of the first textbook of modern chemistry, this famous 18th century French chemist, is best remembered for his experiments on respiration and the composition of air. He devised methods of calculating the consumption of oxygen during various human activities and developed an "ice calorimeter" for studies on animal temperatures related to CO₂ excretion. He was one of the discoverers of the composition of water and to him is due, in large measure, the modern system of chemical nomenclature.

WILLIAM HARVEY 1578–1657

Although there had been many theories about the movement of blood in the body, no one before Harvey had any conception of a continuous stream returning to its source. His book *De motu cordis*, which he dedicated to Charles I, has become one of the most significant books in the history of medicine. It established the circulation of the blood and was written only after he studied existing theories and had dissected some 80 different species from animals to insects.

Harvey also achieved distinction in his work on anatomy, physiology, embryology and neurology.

JAMES LIND 1716–1794

Remembered mainly for his association with the elimination of scurvy from the British Navy, this Scottish M.D. was physician to the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar and later physician to the Royal household at Windsor. He fought jail fever (typhus) by disinfection with wood smoke, advocated the use of hospital ships, arranged for the distillation of sea-water and secured many important and beneficial changes for seafarers. Recognised as the founder of naval hygiene, his place in medical history is secure.

LAËNNEC 1781–1826

Undisputed inventor of the stethoscope, René Theophile Laënnec was born in Brittany. After studying in various military hospitals he became Professor of Medicine at the College de France at the age of 41. His *De l'auscultation médiate* is a classic work from which our knowledge of chest disease is mainly derived.

GALEN 129-201

Ahead of his time in recognising the need for genuine and pure drugs, Galien studied medicine in his native Greece from the age of 16. He probably exerted more influence on medical history than any physician since Hippocrates. Regarded as the founder of experimental physiology and the most distinguished physician of antiquity after Hippocrates, he had no peer as an anatomical dissector - he discovered the sympathetic nervous system, distinguished between sensory and motor nerves and correctly interpreted several cardiac and vascular functions. All this with instruments of the type excavated at Pompeii. No great anatomist followed him until Vesalius in the 16th century and no great physiologist until Harvey in the 17th.

A prolific writer - he is credited with 130 books on medicine and 125 on philosophy - his pharmaceutical formulations were relatively unimportant, most of the so-called galenicus being later developments. He employed ointments to assist wound healing, caustics in surgery and opium as an analgesic.

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EDWARD JENNER 1749-1823

English physician and discoverer of vaccination, Jenner was born in Gloucestershire, the son of a clergyman. As an apprentice to a surgeon at the age of 13, he had noted local popular beliefs about the antagonism between cowpox and smallpox. He later set about confirming this by experiment. After lengthy studies, he inoculated a boy with matter from the vesicles of a milkmaid with cowpox, later the boy was inoculated with smallpox but the disease did not follow. It was not long before Jenner was overwhelmed with requests for lymph and he was soon to describe himself as 'the vaccine clerk of the whole world.'

Jenner, who was also a pupil of John Hunter, coined the word 'virus' and became the first pioneer of virology. His years' efforts of patent vaccination against smallpox became a landmark in biology. All modern methods of preventing certain infectious diseases by immunological methods trace their ancestry to Jenner's work.

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