Greek medicine

The beginning

Greeks believed Apollo invented healing.

The sacred knowledge passed on to Asclepius, god of healing.

The worship of Asclepios began around 500BC.

Hippocrates

about that time Greece's most famous doctor, Hippocrates, was practising.

Hippocrates left over 50 written works

advised doctors on how to examine patients for symptoms

to provide simple treatments

to observe and record the development of diseases.

Schools

Asclepius and Hippocrates represented the two sides of the Greek tradition.

The followers of Asclepios believed in supernatural causes of, and cures for, disease.

The followers of Hippocrates believed that disease had natural causes and that it could be cured by rational methods.

Religious belief and rational explanations closely interwoven and existed alongside one another.

Gods and men

Asclepius was a doctor who was later revered as a god

Hippocrates believed that disease had a rational basis

Medicine in Ancient Greece combined the scientific approach of Hippocrates with the supernatural beliefs of the followers of Asclepios

Asclepius (1200BC - 500AD)

In Ancient Egypt and Greece often difficult to separate legend from history

The earliest doctors were often priests, some of whom were later revered as gods.

One such figure was Asclepius.

Who was Asclepius?

Asclepius was most probably a physician who practised in Greece around 1200BC.

Eventually through myth and legend he became Asclepius, the Greek God of Healing.

How did he become famous?

We know very little, except that temples and shrines were dedicated to him.

People went to these temples, called Asclepions, to pray that their illnesses would be cured.

People also believed that Asclepius's family had healing powers.

In particular his daughter, Hygiea gave her name to the word hygienic.

The Asclepion

Patients would visit, offering gifts and sacrifices to the God.

They would stay overnight - be treated by priest healers.

The snake, the symbol of Asclepius, would often be used in these healings along with ointments. His symbol - serpent wrapped around a staff.

Hippocrates (c.460-377BC)

Hippocrates was a doctor who worked on the Greek island of Cos.

Regarded as the 'Father of Medicine' - his followers wrote over 60 medical books.

He also founded a medical school on Cos.

What was his contribution to medicine?

Hippocrates developed a new approach to medicine – looking beyond supernatural.

This meant that medicine came to be seen as a science rather than a religion.

He stressed the importance of observation, diagnosis and treatment.

His Theory

He believed the body had four humours; black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood.

Illness occurred if one of these humours was out of balance.

The body therefore contained too much or too little of it.

How did he change medicine?

Hippocrates stressed the importance of fresh air, a good diet and plenty of exercise.

His students had to follow a strict ethical code that governed their behaviour as doctors.

Doctors today can still choose to swear the Hippocratic oath.

This oath was an attempt to place doctors on a higher footing than other healers.

# From Hippocrates’ “Epidemics”

“Diseases which have their paroxysms on even days have crises on even days

When paroxysms are on uneven days their crises are on uneven days.”

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Examples of paroxysm frequency | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 14 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 60 | 80 |
| 1 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 11 | 17 | 21 | 27 | 31 |

“If the crisis take place on any other day than on those described, there will be a relapse, which may prove fatal”.

How important was Hippocrates?

Hippocrate's ideas - strange mixture of commonsense and inaccuracies.

His suggestions about diet and exercise are as valid today as they were 2,400 years ago

However, his belief in the Four Humours was completely wrong.

Strangely, this theory lasted until the 17th century, but importance of exercise and diet was

forgotten after the Romans!

Most important contributions - development of the medical profession a code of conduct for doctors.