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The First Physicians

Do you know the name of the most ancient doctor known? The physician Imhotep (pronounced im-HOH-tep) lived 55 centuries ago, in 3500 B.C., in Egypt. He earned fame in many fields — as a politician, astronomer, architect, and physician. He designed the first pyramid — an elaborate tomb for one of the Egyptian pharaohs.

Ancient Egyptian physicians worked harder at keeping the body free of decay after death than at keeping it free of disease during life. They believed the road to eternal life lay in preserving the body. They developed an effective way to embalm bodies. Some Egyptian mummies are still around today.

In addition to preparing bodies for burial, Imhotep may have performed simple surgical operations. But any break-

S Y M P T O M S

- 1. Doctors relied on myths and magical powers.**
- 2. Some doctors were mistreating their patients.**
- 3. Doctors did not understand how the body worked.**

Can You Diagnose the Discoveries?



The first physicians known to western medicine were located in Egypt, Greece, and Rome.

Imhotep is considered the first known physician. He is shown below in a re-creation of an Egyptian wall painting. The primary duty of an Egyptian doctor was to prepare bodies for the afterlife.

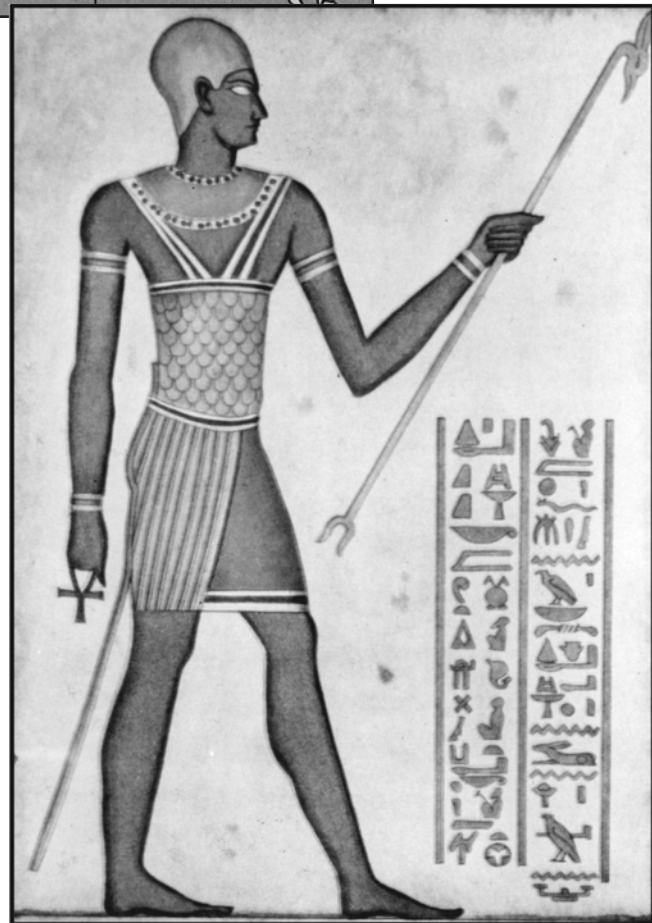
throughs in medicine that he may have made are buried in the mists of time. We know his name and little else.

A more famous ancient physician is Hippocrates (pronounced hi-POK-ruh-teez). We not only know his name, but also know other facts about his life and his medical discoveries. Plato, one of the best-known Greek philosophers, mentioned Hippocrates by name, as did Aristotle, another Greek scientist. They thought well of him and considered him the greatest doctor of their day.

Hippocrates, a Greek, was born in 460 B.C., almost 2,500 years ago, on the island of Kos. This rocky little island is north of Rhodes off the coast of Asia Minor.

Although he lived so long ago, we do have a good idea of what he looked like. In 1933, workers uncovered on Kos a statue of Hippocrates. The statue shows him as a short man, rather stately in his robe, with a bold, courageous look to his face.

He needed all the boldness he could muster to change how doctors practiced medicine.



Other doctors based their healing art upon the belief that evil spirits, hateful demons, and vengeful gods struck people with diseases. Invisible arrows shot by the Greek god Apollo caused pain. One treatment for disease called for the victim to

travel to one of the many pagan temples in Greece. The sick person made a sacrifice and then spent the night in the temple. As he slept, he was supposed to dream away the sickness.

Hippocrates visited Egypt early in life and studied medicine there. He taught at various places, including Athens. Eventually he returned home and began a school of medicine on Kos.

Hippocrates taught methods that must have seemed strange to doctors who expected to treat their patients with chanting and magic potions. Hippocrates changed all of that. He believed every disease had a natural cause. "Find the cause," he said, "then you can cure the disease."

He perfected what today would be called a good bedside manner. He gained the confidence of patients and put their minds at ease. Hippocrates instructed his students to find out as much as possible about the patient. "Ask the patient about the symptoms. How did he feel when the

illness began? Question him about what he usually eats and drinks. Did he change his diet?"

"Allow the patient to rest," he advised. "See that he is kept clean, has fresh air and simple wholesome food." This was

good advice because doctors knew so little about medicine. God has given the body the ability to heal itself if given time to work.

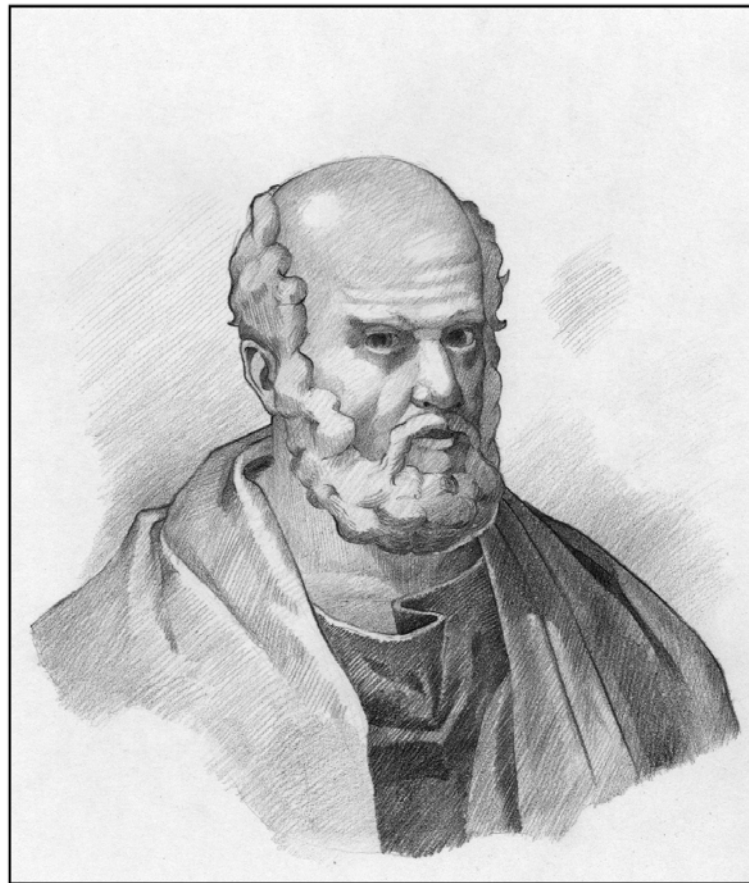
Older doctors couldn't abide by the new ways. They expected patients to make sacrifices to Greek gods and goddesses at the many pagan

temples. "The gods will be angry," these doctors warned. "They will punish doctors and

patients who dare to defy them."

We know in detail what Hippocrates taught because his students made careful notes of his lectures. They collected the notes and published books in his name. More than 50 books carrying his name have come down to us.

For instance, Hippocrates said,



Hippocrates is known as the "Father of Medicine." He is considered one of the greatest physicians the world has ever known.