Early Modern English Medicine

‘It is a wise man’s part, rather to avoid sickness, than to wishe for medicines’.

– Thomas More

Mondays, 2-4 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Lindsey Fitzharris
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Room 604

Office Hours: Mondays, 11:00-12:00, and by appointment

Assessment: 5,000-7,000 word essay

I. Course Description
This course will examine the social and intellectual dimensions of English medicine during the early modern period (c.1500-1750). In doing so, attention will be paid to the question of change and continuity over time, and to the impact religion, demographic shifts and transformations in urban and rural environments had on the medical marketplace.

In particular, students will examine the following themes:

1. Mortality versus Morbidity in Tudor and Stuart England
2. The Demography of Plague Outbreaks
3. Government, Church and People: Responses to Plague
4. Patients and Practitioners in Early Modern England
5. Trade or Profession? The Rising Status of Surgeons
6. Psychiatry and Madness
7. Magic, Mysticism and Medicine: Alchemical Understandings of Health and Disease
8. The Woman’s Place in Early Modern Medicine

II. Course Aims and Objectives:
There are three aims to this course: (1) To develop an appreciation of how English society understood and reacted to death and disease in the early modern period; (2) To understand the cultural and political changes that shaped medicine over the period; (3) To obtain a broad grasp of the historiographical debates in this area. For the most part, this course focuses on the history of early modern medicine in England, although students will be expected to know about contemporary developments in continental Europe.
Specific Learning Objectives:
By the end of this course, students will:

- Have a better understanding of the historic time period.
- Be able to evaluate, quote, summarise, paraphrase and conduct basic research.
- Be able to analyse and evaluate arguments, to spot assumptions and biases, to apply a concept from one text to others, to weigh conflicting evidence, and to support his/her own views with solid evidence and reasoning.

III. Seminar Programme:
Attendance at seminars is compulsory. The first 45 minutes will be lecture-based, after which time we will take a short 10-minute break. The remaining half of the seminar will be introduced and run by 1 or 2 students in rotation. Each student will be responsible for introducing a topic related to that week’s readings, giving a clear analysis of the area, and presenting a list of questions to discuss for the remainder of the seminar.

The student(s) will then be responsible for chairing the session. The themes outlined for each week give you some guide to the areas that might be covered each week, but they are not prescriptive or comprehensive. You are also free to decide how to approach the primary and secondary material for each week. Core secondary texts will be denoted with an asterisk. All primary texts are required each week and can be found on EEBO.

In addition, each student will be required to give a 5-7 minute powerpoint presentation of his/her essay topic in week 4.

IV. Guidelines for Essay
The essay should be between 5,000-7,000 words, including notes, but excluding bibliography. Please follow department guidelines on presentation and layout. Essays should be word-processed, with footnotes and a full bibliography.

1. Essays may be an extension of your seminar discussions.

2. The date for handing in the essay is Monday, April 19th.

Two copies of the essay should be submitted. One copy will be retained for assessment, the other will be returned with comments. Late work will be penalized at 5% per working day. If you need an extension, please contact me at least 48 hours in advance. I will deal with extensions on an individual basis.
IV. Feedback
You can expect a) written comments on your essay b) the opportunity to discuss your course work and essay performance on an individual basis c) feedback on your contribution to seminars at the end of the semester.

V. Academic Integrity
Each student in this course is expected to abide by the UCL Code of Conduct. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in lecture with other students. You can give ‘consulting’ help to or receive ‘consulting’ help from such students.

However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e-mail, an e-mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy.

Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

VI. Museum Outings
Interacting with objects from the past can be just as important as reading about them. To complement your course readings, we will be visiting two museums during the semester. Please meet in the seminar room at 12:30 p.m. on the proposed date (see below for further details). We will travel together as a group to the museum, and follow each trip with a one-hour discussion (on site). Admission fees detailed below.

*The Hunterian Collection at the Royal College of Surgeons (Free)
*The Old Operating Theatre (£4.80)
General Reading List
For more general political and social context, you might look at some of these texts. They are readable introductions to the period. Sharpe and Wrightson are more focused on social history, which is the main theme of this course. Hirst and Coward give a synopsis of the civil wars; and Wrigley & Schofield provide a demographic backdrop to the period we are studying. Don’t be scared by its bulk, just use what you need (this rule applies to all reading lists).


Week 1: Introduction to Early Modern English Medicine

Lecture: ‘The Historiography of the Early Modern Period – Lindsey Fitzharris

This seminar is intended to provide a framework, using works that can be referred to throughout the course (see also general reading list). There is a good deal about London, partly because of England’s peculiar status as a one-city state, and partly because London provides most information about medical practice and regulation. Few of the following give much space specifically to medicine; they are chosen on grounds of their attention to demography, mortality, poverty, etc., which connect to health. The emphasis is on towns, for evidential reasons, but later bibliographies will attempt to provide more on medicine in a rural context.

Secondary Sources


P. Clark and D. Souden (eds.), Migration and Society in Early Modern England (Hutchinson, 1987).


C. Phythian-Adams, Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages (CUP, 1979).

R. Sennett, Flesh and Stone: the Body and the City in Western Civilisation (Faber and Faber, 1994).


Week 2: Mortality versus Morbidity in Tudor and Stuart England

Guest lecture, ‘Understanding Disease through Skeletal Remains’ – Victoria Yorke-Edwards, UCL

In this seminar we will examine morbidity and mortality rates in early modern England to better understand the demography of disease during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Particular focus will be given to literary sources (esp. satire and plays) as this is one of the main sources both for contemporary awareness, and for morbidity as opposed to mortality.

Primary Sources
John Caius, A Boke or Counseill against the Disease called the Wweate (London, 1552).

John Graunt, Natural and Political Observations made upon the Bills of Mortality (London, 1662).

Secondary Sources:


P. Elmer, Healing Arts, chapters 2 & 13, and pp. 344-56.


L. C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London, 1937) – represents earlier literature and history approach, now being revived by cultural historians. See also two next entries:


Week 3: The Black Death: Demography and Responses to Plague

Movie

In this seminar we will consider the demography of plagues in England, and the way in which the disease was understood by both practitioners and the public. From there, we will examine to the ways in which the government, church and laymen responded to plague outbreaks during the early modern period.

Primary Sources:

A Generall Bill for 8 Weeks (1603).

A Generall bill for this present yeere, ending the 16 of December 1630 (1630).

A Form of Meditation, very meet to be daily used of house holders in their houses, in this dangerous and contagious time (1563), in W. K. Clay (ed.), Liturgies and Occasional Forms of Prayer set forth in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, Parker Society (1847), 503-7.


T. Dekker, The Wonderfull Year (1603), from ‘The Plague’ onwards.

Orders Thought Meet by His Majesty’, item two in Certaine Necessary Directions (1636).


Secondary Sources:


*P. Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (1985), chapters 2, 6, 4 or 5; and chapters 8-11.


Week 4: Occupational Structure of Medicine
Lecture, ‘Barbers and Surgeons in Early Modern England’ – Lindsey Fitzharris

This week, we will examine the patients and practitioners of early modern England. Specifically, we will look at the milieu of irregular medical practitioners practising medicine during this period, and assess the appropriateness of the term, ‘medical marketplace’. Apart from midwives, this bibliography is intended to cover the different parts of practice as formally organised, but it should also suggest the limitations of restricting discussion to the ‘tripartite’ model of practice or to professionalisation.

Primary Sources:

Secondary Sources:


C. Webster (ed.), *Caring for Health: History and Diversity*, Open University Course Book (revised colour 3rd edn, 2001).


**For continental comparisons:**


Week 5: The Rise of the Surgeon in Early Modern England

Visit to the Hunterian Museum. Meet in seminar room at 12:30 p.m.

Last week, we discussed the wide variety of people who practiced medicine in the ‘medical marketplace’ of early modern England. In this seminar, we turn our focus specifically to the surgeons.

Primary Sources:
R. Wiseman, *Eight Chirurgicall Treatises* (London, 1676), TBA.

Secondary Sources:


*A. Wear, Knowledge and practice in English medicine, 1550-1680 (CUP, 2000), chp. 5.

Week 6: The Woman’s Place in Early Modern Medicine

Lecture, ‘The Rise of the Male Midwife’—Lindsey Fitzharris

So far, you have examined the many ways in which men practised medicine in the early modern period. But what of the woman’s role in the medical marketplace? This week, we will focus specifically on the many different roles that women played in early modern healthcare, and identify the changes and continuities in these roles between the medieval and early modern periods.

Secondary Sources:


H. Marland *et al.*, “‘Mother and Child Were Saved’: the Memoirs ... of the Frisian Midwife Catharina Schrader” (Rodopi, 1987).


Week 7: Magic, Mysticism and Medicine: Alchemical Understandings of Health and Disease

*Guest lecture, ‘Magical Gems and their Medicinal Uses’—Dr. Thomas Blaen, Exeter University*

In this seminar, we will explore Paracelsus’s ideas for a new kind of medicine, especially his theories about the nature and causes of disease, and compare them with traditional Galenic principles. Although very few of Paracelsus’s works were published during his lifetime, they became much more widely circulated after his death. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, ‘Paracelsianism’ became recognised as a distinct alternative to ‘Galenism’. We will seek to understand why.

**Primary Sources:**

**Secondary Sources:**


D. P. Walker, Spiritual and Demonic Magic (University Park, PA, 1958; rprt 2000).


*C. Webster, From Paracelsus to Newton, (London, 2005).

*C. Webster, Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission (New Haven, 2008).

Week 8: Psychiatry and Madness
Visit to the Old Operating Theatre. Meet in seminar room at 12:30 p.m.

As a medical discipline, psychiatry is unique and perhaps inherently controversial for its presumed authority over not only the nature of the disorder, but also the very nature of the person. This expertise has existed historically in tandem with the ability to classify and to confine. This seminar examines the early history of psychiatry and the treatment of madness by practitioners and public alike.

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources
M. Byrd, Visits to Bedlam (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1974).
B. Clarke, Mental Disorder in Earlier Britain (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1975).
M. DePorte, Nightmares and Hobbyhorses. Swift, Sterne and Augustan Ideas of Madness (California, 1974).
M. Foucault, Madness and Civilization (New York, 1965).


Week 9: The Good Death: Ways of Dying in Early Modern England

Guest lecture, ‘Childhood Illness and Death in the Early Modern Period’ —Dr. Hannah Newton, Bath Spa University

Death in early modern England has been written about extensively. We will be looking at ideas about death, particularly the good death, and how practices around death changed over this period. The ‘loss’ of purgatory, impact of reformed practices, and variations across age-group, especially in views of children, will be major concerns this week.

Primary Sources:
W. Caxton, Here Begynneth A Lityll Treatyse Short And Abrydgyd Spekynge Of The Art And Crafte To Knowe Well To Dye (1495)


G. Herbert, A priest to the temple Or, The Country Parson His Character (1652), chapter XV.


Secondary Sources:

P. Aries, Centuries of childhood (1962).


B. Gordon and P. Marshall (ed.), *The Place Of The Dead: Death And Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.


Week 10: The Eighteenth Century and Beyond
*No lecture. Just general discussion followed by movie and pizza in second half of seminar*

Although we have touched upon this topic in previous sessions, this seminar will focus specifically on medicine in the eighteenth century. In particular, we will examine the institutional changes that occurred during this period which helped elevate the role of the hospital as a centre of learning during the Enlightenment.

Secondary Sources:

A. Digby, Making a Medical Living: Doctors and Patients in the English Market for Medicine, 1720-1911. (CUP, 1994).


Risse, Guenter. Hospital Life in Enlightenment Scotland: Care and Teaching at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh (CUP, 1986).