

TCI 9.8 Medicine

Muslims made some of their most important innovations in the field of medicine. They learned a great deal from the work of ancient Greeks and Indians. Then, as in other fields of study, they improved upon this earlier knowledge.

Muslim doctors established hospitals that were open to all people. By the 10th century, Baghdad had at least five hospitals. Many hospitals served as teaching centers for doctors in training. Anyone who needed treatment could get it at these centers, but there were also hospital caravans that brought medical care to people in remote villages.

Muslim hospitals had separate wards for men and women, surgical patients, and people with diseases that others could catch. Doctors treated ailments with drugs, diet, and exercise. They gave patients remedies made from herbs and other plants, animals, and minerals. Pharmacists made hundreds of medications, such as drugs that dulled patients' pain. Antiseptics (medications that fight infection) cleaned wounds, and ointments helped to heal them.

For some problems, surgeons performed delicate operations as a last resort. Drugs, such as opium and hemlock, put patients to sleep before operations. Muslim surgeons removed limbs, took out tumors, and cleared cataracts (cloudy spots) from the eye. After surgery, doctors used thread made from animal gut to stitch the wounds.

Muslim doctors made many discoveries and helped spread medical knowledge. For example, al-Razi, a Persian doctor, realized that infections were caused by bacteria. He also studied smallpox and measles. His work helped other doctors diagnose and treat these deadly diseases.

The Persian philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna), whom you read about earlier in this lesson, was also a great doctor. In fact, he has been called “the prince of physicians.” His most important medical book, *The Canon of Medicine*, explored the treatment of diseases and became one of the classics in the history of medical scholarship.

Europeans later translated Ibn Sina's book and many other Muslim works into Latin. Medical schools then used these texts to teach their students. In this way, Muslim doctors had a major impact on European medicine.

