

**Dr Priya Rajyaguru, Clinical Teaching Fellow writes:-**

### **Looking back through time: The medical profession**

As we enter the final month of spring, a recap of the recent academy happenings is due.

Our final year medical students left having completed the Preparing for Professional Practice module and are now somewhere suitably exciting on their electives! We wish them all the very best in their futures and may even see a couple in the region as foundation doctors later this year.

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students are currently working very hard especially with their end of year exams on the horizon. It's not all doom and gloom however; this past month the year 3 central study days took place. These were an opportunity to re-visit some of the fundamental aspects of training as a doctor especially in relation to professionalism and future careers. The Gloucester Clinical Teaching Fellows assisted Dr Peter Fletcher (Academy Dean) and Ms Jo Hutchings (University of Bristol Careers advisor) in facilitating these.

Whilst sat in the lofty and somewhat *Harry Potter-esque* Wills Hall Memorial Building, I found myself reflecting on my university experiences and career choices. Just like so many, I went to medical school because of a distinct interest in the human body, particularly the human mind. Perhaps there was also a small undeniable interest in TV shows of the time such as *E.R.* (well, George Clooney's not a bad concept for a work colleague is he?).

Frivolity aside, embarking on and committing to a career in medicine is a very serious decision, and the implications of this are perhaps not those that necessarily appear as the most exciting in the young eyes of keen undergraduates- but oh it is! This is where the role of teachers and role models really take precedence and carry such great responsibility.

I have always been fascinated by the history of medicine especially the origins of our medical profession. Perhaps it was more an interest in language and ancient cultures that lead me to undertake an informal review of the medical world, but it really is fascinating with uncanny modern day relevance.

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:-**

**Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December  
from 12.30pm @  
Redwood Education  
Centre – Annual  
Educational Leads Study  
Afternoon for Unit  
Coordinators, Unit Tutors  
& Element Leads**

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For example, the first official medical school in the world was the Schola Medica Salernitana situated on the Tyrrhenian Sea in the south Italian city of Salerno. It was the most important source of medical knowledge in Western Europe at the time, as ancient Arabic medical texts were translated into Latin and accumulated in the library of Montecassino. As a result the work of Hippocrates, Galen and Dioscorides was supplemented by Arabic medical practice, and taught to some of the first medical students of the time.

Perhaps of all the influential figures from antiquity however, it is Hippocrates, the 'Father of Western Medicine' who continues to carry the greatest legacy. Born in the year 460 BC on the Greek island of Kos, Hippocrates was a feisty and revolutionary fellow. For him medicine and the healing arts had a different basis-not the purely spiritual, religious or magical form that many had preached previously, but instead a focus and respect for rationalism and science. Indeed it was Hippocrates who introduced our modern day concepts of physiology, physical diagnosis, pathology and surgery.

Though lacking in scientific knowledge and based on the ancient practice of *Humorism*, Hippocrates and his disciples created a structured approach and a key paradigm shift from the supernatural to the natural<sup>1</sup> which has become the standard outline of Western medicine today.

Most famously attributed to Hippocrates however, is the Hippocratic Oath. Somewhat shockingly it is possible that the true author of this work remains unknown throughout history and is currently the subject of much lively debate. For example the opening line of the original oath reads:

"I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses..."

In Greek legend, Apollo was the god of healing who fell in love with a meagre mortal. This mortal was named Coronis and heartbreakingly she fell in love with another. As a result, Coronis was killed but was carrying the unborn child of Apollo, Asclepius. Asclepius grew up and had children of his own: Hygieia, the goddess of health and Panacea the goddess of cures.

Whilst this may seem a lovely bedtime story, the relevance of this to the question of who wrote the Hippocratic Oath is obvious-would Hippocrates really have devoted the opening sentence of his Oath to the ancient gods he so strongly denounced?

This is a question that remains frustratingly unanswered but what does seem certain is the cultural and professional relevance of the Oath's sentiments. Calling on physicians to protect all life, to maintain the trust between doctor and patient, to recognize one's limitations, to respect each other, to renounce self-interest in the treatment of patients the Oath is a powerful advocate of professional integrity. These are values embedded in history and are very much alive today as we teach and guide our students on their educational journeys.

It is with great sadness I discovered that some universities have dropped the Oath from graduation ceremonies in recent years, whilst others have developed an updated institutional version.

Graduates from the University of Bristol will recite the Bristol Promise this coming July which carries all the same sentiments as the original. In many ways I recall feeling incredibly proud of my friends and myself on graduation day as we recited our university's oath. There was a tremendous energy in the room and one that certainly left us inspired and humbled by virtue of upholding something so very grounded in history.

It's with this in mind that we welcome our year 2 students to the academy next week, marking the commencement of the *Lithe* placement. An opportunity to invite new students into the clinical environment for the first time, it is also a chance to impart our enthusiasm for the profession that unites us all. Equally important is helping students understand some of the key principles of working life as a doctor especially at induction; and perhaps it's also pertinent to highlight how we got to where we are today by looking back in time.

<sup>1</sup> Saval R, Munro C. (2014). From Asclepius to Hippocrates: The Art and Science of Healing. *American Journal of Critical Care*. 23: 437-439

