

Medical Doctor Encyclopedia Article

Medical Doctor

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The long and sometimes bizarre history of Western medicine can be traced as far back as an Egyptian surgical papyrus of the seventeenth century B. C. E. , which advises treating a head wound by "first softening the head with grease, then pouring milk into both ears" (Swierczynsky 2000, p. 115). Despite diagnoses and cures that might seem laughable or horrendous to us, doctors have always intended, as do medical students today, to "make a difference in people's lives, to relieve pain and suffering." From the bloodletting of the Middle Ages, where surgeons got their nickname "leeches," to the miracle antibiotics and technological advances of the twentieth century, doctors have seen their job as the treatment of illness, injuries, and other adverse conditions.

Any degree holder can apply to medical school upon qualifying through the Medical Colleges Admission Test. The four-year graduate program includes two years of work in the areas of anatomy, biochemistry, biology of healthy organisms, pathology, immunology, writing skills, and clinical studies. The third year is a forty-hour hospital workweek divided into intensive sections of internal medicine, surgery, psychiatry, obstetrics and gynecology, and pediatrics. In the fourth year, the student takes electives focusing on an area of interest and applies for a residency with a hospital. Generalists, including family practice and internal medicine interns, take a three-year residency. Surgeons and specialists require up to five years.

The old catastrophic view of medicine is expanding to include preventive care. Diet, exercise, herbal remedies, healing touch, and techniques such as acupuncture are being added to the repertoire of tools for staying healthy as well as for recovering from serious illness. And doctors would probably still agree with Galen, the ancient Greek, concerning the patient's participation: "confidence and hope do more than the physic."

Bibliography

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