The Legacy of Hippocrates

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Introduction

Greek Medicine: 6th century BC to 4th century AD

Classical, Hellenistic and early Byzantine era
Disease descriptions

- Hippocrates: father of Medicine.
- Born in Cos 460 BC; died 70 to 90 years later.
- Little known about his life, but traveled a lot; spent large amount of time in Athens.
- Multiple medical works of Classical Greece attributed to him: “Corpus Hippocraticum”.
Hippocrates cont’d

Hippocratic Corpus

- Diseases are thought not as acts of wrath of gods.
- Diseases are thought as imbalance of humors in the body (κρασίς). Systematic observation, history and physical exam become the focus of physicians.
- Many medical and surgical treatments are introduced.
- Systematic observation of patients is advocated, in order to make accurate prognoses.
Hippocratic Corpus cont’d

Classical Greece context:

Philosophy: effort to explain natural events without attributing them to supernatural forces.

History: documentation of events in a logical manner, with causation and results of human actions analyzed.
Hippocratic Corpus cont’d

Classical Greece context:

Politics: democracy first appeared. Equality of citizens against the law and the city-state acknowledged (unfortunately only free men).

Medicine: contact with Phoenicians, Egyptians brings new ideas.
Hippocratic Corpus cont’d

Hippocratic theory of body Humours
Hippocratic Corpus cont’d

- Health: harmony of humors in balance; “natural way” (eucrasia)
- Disease: harmony disturbed, imbalance; dyscrasia.
- Nature (physis) has healing powers. Physician supports patient till nature heals him/her.
- Treatment was generally conservative
The Sacred Disease

- Real author unknown; probably same author as Air, Water, Places.
- Disease: epilepsy
- Ionian dialect; 4th or 3rd Century B.C. (probably a contemporary to Socrates).
The Sacred Disease cont’d

Two features discussed in the book:
- Brain is the seat of consciousness
- Sacred disease is not sacred, but natural like every other disease.

- All nature is divine and not only one aspect of it
- Disease is called sacred because of lack of cure.
“I am about to discuss the disease called \textit{“sacred”}. It is not, in my opinion, any more sacred or more divine than other diseases, but has a natural cause and its supposed divine origins due to men's inexperience and to their wonder at its peculiar character.”
The Sacred Disease cont’d

- Cause: brain disease. Brain melts in embryo or there is blockage of air, which is carried by veins and causes intelligence.
- Recognized adult and pediatric forms, importance of heredity. Children frequently die.
- Association with limb paralysis. Did he know about cerebral palsy?
- Epidemiology: phlegmatics > bilious
Aphorisms

I-6. Desperate cases need the most desperate remedies.

II-1. A disease in which sleep causes trouble is fatal. Where sleep is beneficial, it is not fatal.

II-7. When bodies become thin over a long period of time, feed them up again slowly. But when the wasting has come on in a short time, feed them up again quickly.
Aphorisms cont’d

II-19. It is unwise to prophecy either death or recovery in acute diseases.

II-33. In every illness, a healthy frame of mind and an eager application to victuals is good. The reverse is bad.
Aphorisms cont’d

II-41. Those who are subject to frequent and severe fainting attacks without obvious cause die suddenly.

II-44. Sudden death is more common in those who are naturally fat than in the lean.

III-15. As regards the weather in general: drought is more healthy than rain and less likely to provoke fatal illness.
IV-36. Paroxysms of sweating in the course of fevers occurring on the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 14th, 17th, 21st, 27th, 31st and 34th days of the disease are a good omen. Such paroxysms mark the crisis of the disease. But should such paroxysms not occur, then expect a pain, a long illness and relapse.
V-6. Unless those who contract tetanus die within four days they recover.

V-8. If sufferers from pleurisy do not cough up material within fourteen days, the inflammation produces empyema.

V-13. Frothy blood comes from the lungs.
VI-8. Ulcers in the body are difficult to heal in dropsical patients.

VI-25. When erysipelas, beginning on the surface, extends deeply into the body it is bad. However, deep inflammation coming to the surface is good.

VII-72. Sleep and wakefulness, exceeding the average, mean disease.
Aphorisms cont’d

I-1. Life is short, science is long; opportunity is elusive, experiment is dangerous, judgement is difficult. It is not enough for the physician to do what is necessary, but the patient and the attendants must do their part as well, and circumstances must be favorable.
References