



# Table of Contents

Chapter 1:	The First Physicians . . . . .	.4
Chapter 2:	Greek Medicine Goes Wrong . . . . .	.12
Chapter 3:	Fabric of the Body . . . . .	.18
Chapter 4:	Father of Modern Surgery . . . . .	.24
Chapter 5:	The Living River . . . . .	.32
Chapter 6:	The Invisible Kingdom . . . . .	.38
Chapter 7:	Triumph Over Smallpox . . . . .	.44
Chapter 8:	Davy Deadens Pain . . . . .	.52
Chapter 9:	Morton Defeats the Pain of Surgery . . . . .	.60
Chapter 10:	Death House in Vienna . . . . .	.68
Chapter 11:	The Chemist Who Became a Doctor . . . . .	.76
Chapter 12:	Joseph Lister Fights Infection . . . . .	.86
Chapter 13:	The Search for Disease Germs . . . . .	.92
Chapter 14:	Louis Pasteur Again . . . . .	.98
Chapter 15:	Dr. Lind's Limes . . . . .	.108
Chapter 16:	The Hidden Hunger . . . . .	.114
Chapter 17:	Mysterious Rays . . . . .	.122
Chapter 18:	Useful Radiation . . . . .	.130
Chapter 19:	Wonder Drugs . . . . .	.136
Chapter 20:	Mold Battles Bacteria . . . . .	.142
Chapter 21:	Medicine in Today's World . . . . .	.148
Bibliography:	. . . . .	.154
Answers to Chapter Questions:	. . . . .	.155
Index:	. . . . .	.156

# The First Physicians

**D**o you know the name of the most ancient doctor known? The physician Imhotep (pronounced im-HOH-tep) lived 55 centuries ago, in 3500 B.C., in Egypt. He earned fame in many fields — as a politician, astronomer, architect, and physician. He designed the first pyramid — an elaborate tomb for one of the Egyptian pharaohs.

Ancient Egyptian physicians worked harder at keeping the body free of decay after death than at keeping it free of disease during life. They believed the road to eternal life lay in preserving the body. They developed an effective way to embalm bodies. Some Egyptian mummies are still around today.

In addition to preparing bodies for burial, Imhotep may have performed simple surgical operations. But any break-

## S Y M P T O M S

1. Doctors relied on myths and magical powers.
2. Some doctors were mistreating their patients.
3. Doctors did not understand how the body worked.

*Can You Diagnose the Discoveries?*



The first physicians known to western medicine were located in Egypt, Greece, and Rome.

Imhotep is considered the first known physician. He is shown below in a re-creation of an Egyptian wall painting. The primary duty of an Egyptian doctor was to prepare bodies for the afterlife.

throughs in medicine that he may have made are buried in the mists of time. We know his name and little else.

A more famous ancient physician is Hippocrates (pronounced hi-POK-ruh-teez). We not only know his name, but also know other facts about his life and his medical discoveries. Plato, one of the best-known Greek philosophers, mentioned Hippocrates by name, as did Aristotle, another Greek scientist. They thought well of him and considered him the greatest doctor of their day.

Hippocrates, a Greek, was born in 460 B.C., almost 2,500 years ago, on the island of Kos. This rocky little island is north of Rhodes off the coast of Asia Minor.

Although he lived so long ago, we do have a good idea of what he looked like. In 1933, workers uncovered on Kos a statue of Hippocrates. The statue shows him as a short man, rather stately in his robe, with a bold, courageous look to his face.

He needed all the boldness he could muster to change how doctors practiced medicine.



Other doctors based their healing art upon the belief that evil spirits, hateful demons, and vengeful gods struck people with diseases. Invisible arrows shot by the Greek god Apollo caused pain. One treatment for disease called for the victim to



## Questions

### The First Physicians

*Answer T or F for true or false, or  
Select A or B for the phrase that best completes the sentence.*

- T F** 1. The medical discoveries of the Egyptian doctor Imhotep are well-known today.
- A B** 2. The most famous ancient Greek doctor was (A. Plato; B. Hippocrates).
- T F** 3. One of the Greek treatments for disease was to have the sick person dream away the sickness in a pagan temple.
- A B** 4. Older doctors predicted that doctors who followed Hippocrates' teaching would be (A. punished; B. rewarded) by the gods and goddesses.
- A B** 5. The Hippocratic Oath for doctors is (A. a pledge of proper conduct; B. a schedule of prices a doctor should charge).
- A B** 6. The title given to Hippocrates is (A. Father of Greek Philosophy; B. Father of Medicine).
- A B** 7. The most important physician during Roman times was (A. Galen; B. Socrates).
- A B** 8. The city of Alexandria was noted for its huge (A. aqueduct; B. library).
- A B** 9. Galen learned firsthand about the human body from (A. dissecting the bodies of criminals; B. treating injured gladiators).
- T F** 10. When Galen went to Rome he was put in prison.
- T F** 11. Galen believed that the marvelous complexity of the human body pointed to a Creator.





# EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

**F**rom surgery to vaccines, man has made great strides in the field of medicine. Quality of life has improved dramatically in the last few decades alone, and the future is bright. But students must not forget that God provided humans with minds and resources to bring about these advances.

A biblical perspective of healing and the use of medicine provides the best foundation for treating diseases and injury. In *Exploring the History of Medicine*, author John Hudson Tiner reveals the spectacular discoveries that started with men and women who used their abilities to better mankind and give glory to God.

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