

A NOTE ON THE ENDEAVORS FOR THE STIRRING CULPRIT

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Some illustrations have the ability to take you through the many eras of history by merely looking at it. This particular image depicts not only a view captured from medieval China but also tends to send one's mind back into a time when the Greek and Chinese civilizations were still exploring what would be handed down to us centuries later and become some of our present practices. The Chinese in particular have been acknowledged for exploring many branches of medicine like acupuncture and herbal medicine along with making efforts to develop eternal life granting elixirs. They also offered an equally significant role in developing anaesthetic potions and surgical techniques some of which remained prevalent practices over the ages. In the second and third century men like Hua Tuo started taking an interest in medicine while trying to help soldiers during the many wars fought during that period. It is during this period that the science of surgery flourished noticeably and became more than a labour intended for the lower stratum of medical doctors.

Looking at the picture one cannot help but compare its many features to our medical and surgical practices today. For instance, we can immediately notice that the surface the patient is positioned on is white,

clean and spotless. The patient seems to be lying very still which could be assumed to be due to the effect of hemp for reducing pain as was the practice during medieval times in China. This practice was contrary to those in Europe where surgery was occasionally performed with the patient wide awake. The patient is draped whereas the surgical site is exposed and appears to be clean. The surgeon is standing on the right side of the patient and has his sleeves rolled up and is wearing a very neat apparel. He has his instruments to his left lined up in a neat fashion on a surface that is covered with a clean sheet. There are multiple vessels for holding liquids which could be used in the surgical process. He is holding an instrument, probably a bronze scalpel as was the practice in those days. He has a helper who could be a nurse, to his right. She is also clean and holds a dish looking intently towards the surgeon and the patient as if waiting for any assistance that might be required of her. The white curtains noticeable in the background are also clean giving the enclosure of the elementary surgical room an untainted look.

Each one of the characteristics of the picture resonates with many of the existing practices of medicine

and surgery today. The clean surgical table and the draped patient in the picture have evolved into practices of germ – free operation theatres, strictly sterilized drapes to cover the table and the patient while carefully exposing the surgical site in order to prevent contamination by seen and unseen contaminants. The methods for cleaning surgical instruments and drapes for covering all surfaces in an operation theatre have progressed into rigorous sterilization procedures employing autoclaves to eliminate all possible living organisms. Intently on – looking helpers have translated into specialist nurses who have become a vital part of the surgical team with their position chartered immediately adjacent to the surgeon, not only so as to assist the surgeon during the procedure but also to ensure sterilization of the patient. The theatre, the surgical field within and the surgeons. The experiments conducted by ancient Chinese with hemp and other herbs to reduce pain sensation have developed into an entire science of anaesthesiology where the doctors execute the principles of anaesthesia and loss of pain before beginning any surgical procedure.

Not only has modern medicine been subjective to the practices of medieval China but the journey of discovery made by the Greek and the Arabs has also pro-

ven to the equally influential. The notions behind procedures like radical excision of cancerous lesions and quarantine of epidemics had been explored by Arab scientists like Al-Razi and Al-Khwarzmi ages ago and now, have found their niches in medical practice globally today. Although the blood – letting practices of barber surgeons in Europe during the Middle Ages have extinguished but their customs were not put out without reason. They were eventually proven obsolete with trial and research in efforts to develop better medical care that would effectively influence human well being.

In a nutshell many of the practices we follow today were not new age concoctions conceived out of mere premonition but have been honed and perfected to accomplish results that have become standard practice in many fields of medicine including pharmacology, anaesthesiology and surgery. The path we as physicians, surgeons, pharmacologists, anaesthetists, oncologists, gynaecologists tread today would not have been possible without the efforts of the inquisitive minds of the Greeks, the Chinese and the Arabs that led to the eventual birth of modern medicine, the medicine as we know today.