

Knowledge Organiser: Medicine 1250 – 1500

Key dates	
1348	Outbreak of the Black Death
1440	Johannes Gutenberg creates the world's first printing press.

Key characters	
Hippocrates	Ancient Greek physician, created the theory of the four humours.
Galen	Physician in ancient Rome who developed Hippocrates' theories further and wrote more than 350 books about medicine. His teachings were promoted by the Church because they fitted with Christian ideology.

Key terminology
Apothecaries – People who mixed herbal remedies and had good knowledge of the healing powers of plants.
Astrology - The study of the alignment of the planets and stars, used for diagnosing illness. Many people believed the Black Death was caused by a bad alignment of the planets.
Barber surgeon - Barbers worked with sharp knives and, as well as cutting hair, they often performed surgical procedures. Barbers would do surgery and not physicians.
The Black Death - An outbreak of the bubonic plague, spread by fleas on rats. Usually fatal within 3-5 days.
Decaying matter - Material, such as vegetables or animals, that has died and is rotting.
The four humours - The theory that ill health is caused by an imbalance of the four humours in the body. These are blood, phlegm (what is coughed up or sneezed out of the nose), black bile (excrement) and yellow bile (pus or vomit).
Mass - Roman Catholic service where bread and wine is given.
Miasma - Smells from decaying matter that were believed to cause disease.
Phlebotomy or bloodletting - A common treatment for imbalance of the humours. This was done by cutting a vein, using leeches or cupping (piercing the skin with a knife).
Physicians - Medieval doctors were known as physicians. They would diagnose illness and recommend a course of treatments but rarely got involved in treating the patients themselves.
Printing press - A machine for printing text or pictures.
Purging - Inducing people to vomit or giving them a laxative to clear out their digestive system; used to balance out the humours.
Quarantine - Separating the sick from the healthy to stop the spread of disease. During the Black Death outbreak, the government imposed quarantine of 40 days on people new to an area and quarantined houses where plague had broken out.
Regimen Sanitatis - A set of instructions by physicians to help a patient maintain good health. This would have included bathing, not over-eating and taking moderate exercise.
Remedies - Herbal infusions used to treat illness. A common remedy of the time was called <i>Theriaca</i> , which could contain up to 70 ingredients.
Supernatural cures - Religious cures such as healing prayers, paying for a mass, fasting and going on pilgrimages.
Urine charts – Physicians would examine people's urine, checking colour, thickness, smell (and even taste) to diagnose illness.
SUMMARY OF THE PERIOD
Very few scientific advances in this period. People believed disease was sent from God as a punishment for sin and it was not possible to question these teachings. The Church used ancient texts by Hippocrates and Galen to explain illness. These put forward the theory of the four humours. People also looked to astrology and urine charts to diagnose illness. Physicians would give patients a personalised diagnosis but treatment was often given by midwives and barber surgeons. People would also go to apothecaries for herbal remedies. The invention of the printing press was perhaps the most significant innovation of this period as it would encourage the spread of new ideas.