

CHAPTER 2

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

Learning Questions

1. How did preliterate societies explain illness?
2. What was Hippocrates' humoral theory of disease?
3. Why did scientific medicine not advance during the Middle Ages?
4. Why was Pasteur's germ theory of disease so important?
5. Why was John Snow's research on water and cholera so important?
6. Why is public health controversial?

Chapter Outline

- I. Learning Questions
- II. Health and Illness in the Preindustrial World
 - A. The Ancient Civilizations
 - B. The Middle Ages
- III. The Rise of Scientific Medicine
 - A. The Renaissance
 - B. The Eighteenth Century
 - C. The Nineteenth Century
 - D. Ethical Issues in Scientific Medicine
- IV. Social Epidemiology Yesterday and Today
 - A. The Industrial Revolution
 - B. The Beginning of Epidemiology: John Snow and Cholera
 - C. The Epidemiological Transition
 - D. Public Health
 - E. A Word about Rates
- V. Conclusion
- VI. Summary
- VII. Giving It Some Thought

Key Terms

Cell theory: the view that cells are the basic functional and structural unit for all organisms

Epidemiological transition: the shift in the nature of disease and illness from ancient times to the present day, thanks to basic changes in society and advances in scientific medicine and social epidemiology

Epidemiology: the study of the causes and the distribution of disease and illness

Germ theory: the view that microorganisms cause disease

Humoral theory: the view that illness stems from an imbalance in a person's four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile

Incidence: in epidemiology, the number of cases of illness in a given location in relation to the population size of the location

Prevalence: in epidemiology, the number of people with an illness in a given location in relation to the population size of the location

Primary prevention: in public health, efforts to distinguish and improve aspects of the social and physical environments that cause health problems

Public health: all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole

Rate: another way of expressing a percentage

Scientific medicine: the use of science to understand the causes and treatment of, and possible cures for, disease and illness

Secondary prevention: in public health, efforts to distinguish and change behaviors and situations that put specific individuals at risk for a health problem

Social epidemiology: the study of the social causes and social distribution of disease, illness, and other health problems

Tertiary prevention: in public health, efforts to minimize or prevent short- and long-term consequences of a health problem

Trepanning: the drilling of holes in the skull of an ill individual to release the evil spirits who had taken over the person's body

“Giving It Some Thought”

You are an elementary school principal who recognizes the importance of timely childhood vaccinations for the health of your students, faculty, and staff. A family moves into your school district and wants to enroll their first-grade child. The child's parents tell you that the child has never been vaccinated for measles, mumps, and whooping cough because they believe vaccinations are dangerous for children. They are very sincere in their belief and admit that it is related to their religious beliefs. Your state provides a religious exception for vaccination, but it does not allow parents to refuse vaccination because they think it could pose risks to their children. What do you do?

Online Resources

1. Brief History of Healthcare
<http://www.nofinishlineblog.com/a-brief-history-of-healthcare-how-did-we-get-it-so-wrong-where-to-we-go-from-here.html>

How does the history of healthcare differ when comparing Canada and the U.S.?

2. AlterNet

<http://www.alternet.org/10-most-evil-medical-experiments-conducted-history>

What is the responsibility of ethic in medical experimentation?

3. Newsweek Magazine

<http://www.newsweek.com/most-controversial-health-stories-2015-407035>

Do you agree that these are the most controversial health stories? Why or why not?