History of Medicine Society: Norah Schuster Essay Prize

2020-2021 Winners:

'Working in a Comfort Formerly Unknown': Interwar Bermondsey's Pioneering Foot Clinic and its Utopian Ambitions

Mr Christopher Mitchell, Third Year Medical Student, King's College London

Biography

Chris is a third-year graduate medical student at King's College London. Before entering medicine, he studied physiology at the University of Leicester where he won prizes for research into Parkinson's disease and Huntington's disease. Although Chris maintains an interest in neurology, his chief interests are health inequalities and planetary health. Outside of medical school, Chris is co-chair of the Citizens UK Fair Energy Campaign, a national community organising campaign working to reduce financial and environmental exploitation in the energy industry.

Abstract

In 1930, the Bermondsey Public Health Department made the rather unusual decision to establish the first municipal foot clinic in Britain. Although superficially mundane, the foot clinic was an inventive and multi-faceted attempt to treat Bermondsey's rampant poverty. Primarily, the clinic sought to improve the occupational fitness of the population in an area where the majority of jobs required workers to be stood up all day. This was hoped to increase household income and reduce the burden of poverty on health. In addition to this, the foot clinic was inspired by specific modernist ideals of movement according to which urban poverty restricted people to unhealthy and improper gaits. The foot clinic was intended to free patients to move more naturally, resulting in a range of physiological and spiritual benefits.

Finally, the architecture of the building which housed the foot clinic was innovatively designed to encourage its patients to adopt more hygienic ways of living in their own homes. This analysis expands the current historical understanding of public health between the wars. The clinic's aims are difficult to compartmentalise into either of the two motives typically attributed to interwar public health: improvement of the physical environment, or health education. Rather, the doctors behind the clinic saw these two goals as connected and sought to achieve both simultaneously. Additionally, this study reveals the profound influence of utopian political and religious agendas to the local development on the new paradigm of public health that was consolidated in the interwar period. Altogether, the creativity and holism that resulted in this surprising attempt to improve health by ameliorating poverty should offer inspiration to us in our present context, in which we too are challenged by stark health inequalities.

Rethinking the Peacock Club

Miss Eleanor Pace, Medical Student, King's College London

Biography

Eleanor Pace is a final year medical student at GKT School of Medical Education (King's College London), having previously achieved a degree in Biomedical Science from King's College London. Fostering a longstanding interest in history, the opportunity to undertake a scholarly project in the history of medicine (from which the research for this essay was derived) during her time at medical school was a very welcome one.

Abstract

This essay looks closely at the 'Peacock Club'- a group of surgeons, cardiologists and scientists who between 1948 and 1956, at Guy's Hospital in London, guided by surgeon Russell Brock, dedicated themselves to the surgical treatment of congenital heart disease. Existing literature praises the club as a shining example of both teamwork and contributions to surgery, but this essay aims to take a more critical approach to analysing the club's inner workings as a team, the factors that made it possible for them to work in the way in which they did, as well as providing an insight into whether their approach was in fact unique. Primary source materials used include the minutes of the Peacock Club meetings, as transcribed in Professor Tom Treasure's book: 'The Heart club: A History of London's Pioneering Heart Surgeons', journal articles of some of the work the group published, as well as obituaries of several members of the club and the original minutes of 'Charlie's Club'-used as a point of comparison as a similar club at the time. The findings indicate that teamwork was not necessarily at the heart of the success of the club and cannot always be thought of as simply 'good' or 'bad', but must be considered within the wider context at the time. The research also highlighted that the Peacock Club were not exclusive in their approach- other similar clubs, such as 'Charlie's Club', did exist during an overlapping time period. Charlie's Club functioned in a different way, demonstrating alternative approaches were both possible and even potentially advantageous under the same contemporary circumstances.

Harold Gillies and the 'plastic bug': Specialisation, plastic surgery and interwar Britain

Miss Elizabeth Faulkner, Final Year Medicine MBBS, King's College London

Biography

Elizabeth Faulkner is a final year medical student studying at King's College London. She plans to pursue a career in surgery, with particular interests in the field of plastic and reconstructive surgery. Elizabeth also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Durham University.

"It was a privilege to spend time in the archives at BAPRAS and the Wellcome Collection. Leafing through reams of original sources immerses you in a pocket of time, in a culture with different norms and values to your own. I felt like I got to know Gillies, through the intimacy of reading correspondence to friends, seeing the attention given to a draft of a speech crossed out and re-written for better effect and in reading countless obituaries praising his skill and personality. I began to admire Gillies not only for his innovative surgical techniques, but his passion for plastic surgery and his mission to see it legitimised as a peacetime speciality. While anyone would be forgiven for thinking little happened to plastic surgery during the interwar years, it is during this time that Gillies shows his true fight, one not of war and glory, but of dogged dedication to his speciality."

Abstract

For his pioneering surgical work in World War I, Sir Harold Delf Gillies' is widely considered the 'father of modern plastic surgery' (Crumley, 2003). While this work is well documented in literature, far less commentary has discussed what happened to Gillies' nascent specialism of plastic surgery in the interwar years that followed. This essay aimed to explore that question.

Primary sources from both the BAPRAS and Wellcome archives were consulted, which unearthed original articles, letters and speeches written by Gillies as he tried to promote his new speciality, whilst also adhering to the strict medical advertising standards of the time. Obituaries, both drafts and those published at the time of Gillies' death, were also found. Old press archives were accessed to reveal both how Gillies' peacetime work was covered in mass media, and to help paint an understanding of the then public's perception of plastic surgery. Secondary sources utilised included Pound's 1964 biography of Gillies as well as contemporary academics' analysis of plastic surgery and medical specialisation during the interwar years.

The research conducted led this essay to conclude that, in an age before routes to specialisation had been formally institutionalised, plastic surgery remained restricted to Gillies' work and direct influence. Gillies successfully forged a space for his own practice; utilising his fame, reputation and connections to build an informal legitimacy amongst peers and colleagues. Yet the institutional landscape restricted the dissemination of medical advance, as rigid advertising censorship and a lack of certified medical specialist training and professional bodies, all acted as barriers to building formal legitimacy that would have enabled the specialty of plastic surgery to extend beyond Gillies' immediate sphere.

How has the promotion of safer sex amongst men who have sex with men evolved since the 1990s in the United Kingdom?

Mr Laith Evans, Fifth Year Medical Student (currently intercalating), Home Medical School, Norwich Medical School (UEA), Intercalation Institute, Birkbeck, University of London

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Biography

Laith Evens is an intercalating medical student from Norwich Medical School studying for a master's in "Medical Humanities" at Birkbeck, University of London. He is interested in increasing healthy literacy amongst the public (in particular within BAME and LGBTQIA+ populations) and in widening access to studying medicine. After graduating he would like to specialise in paediatrics.

Abstract

This essay aims to chart the ways in which safer sex campaigns, specifically aimed at men who have sex with men (MSM), have changed in the United Kingdom since the 1990s. By using a variety of primary sources, retrieved from the Wellcome Collection and the HIV graphic communication design archives, I have analysed the subtle and overt changes in design, message and target audience of safer sex campaigns aimed at MSM in relation to HIV/AIDS over the past 30 years or so. I have also looked contextually to suggest why they have changed. Initially, my analysis focuses on physical resources published in the 1990s and 2000s which reflecting the aims of various public health groups and scientific knowledge of HIV/AIDS at the time of publication. As I move through the 2000s and into the 2010s the safer sex campaigns become more recognisable, with some still being used today. As a result of the change in social climate and technology, the campaigns change in nature becoming digital and present on social media. Using my findings, I then make suggestions for the trajectory of future safer sex campaigns relating to HIV/AIDS and the MSM community and emphasise the importance of continued production of safer sex materials in the mission to eradicate HIV transmission in the UK

2020-2021 Highly commended:

Exploring the origins of the Anti-Vaccination Movement as portrayed in Death as a Skeletal Figure by E.L. Sambourne

Miss Ecem Duygu Mimoglu, Year Four MBBS Medicine, Imperial College London

Biography

Miss Ecem Duygu Mimoglu is a fourth-year medical student at Imperial College London. This year, she has undertaken an iBSc on Medical Humanities, Philosophy, and Law, which has taught her a vast amount on the history of the medical profession and the importance of medical humanities in developing high-quality clinical care. She is particularly interested in medical ethics and law, and as such is currently undertaking a project on the reconciliation of virtue ethics and the four principles approach on the topic of euthanasia. Ecem has also been partaking in Imperial's extra-curricular Contemporary Philosophy course in order to develop this interest further. In terms of clinical fields, she is passionate about Paediatrics and has been elected as the next president of Imperial's Paediatrics Society. She also has a keen interest in rheumatology and looks forward to exploring this in the coming years.

Abstract

The anti-vaccination movement has existed since the discovery of vaccination itself and has continually presented a significant public health risk. This essay seeks to explore the origins of the anti-vaccination movement through an analysis of Death as a skeletal figure, a cartoon created as a commentary on the 1898 Vaccination Act by E.L. Sambourne. Death as a skeletal figure explicitly blames the National Anti-Vaccination League for the legalisation of non-vaccination and provides an illustration of the prevailing contemporary stereotypes of anti-vaccination protestors (although it fails to acknowledge the significant socio-economic and philosophical underpinnings of their movement).It is a striking depiction of the deep divisions between the societal classes of Victorian England and is a strong reminder of the importance of vaccination, not just as a matter of public health, but also of autonomy and equality in healthcare. It is concluded that the core ethical dilemma plaguing the Victorian public was whether an individual's right to autonomy supersedes the government's intentions of protecting public health. The highlighted themes remain pertinent to the anti-vaccination movement present today.

The masculinisation of hysteria: gender disparities in mental health history, c. 1860 - c. 1910

Miss Emma Mary Bowden, Third Year Undergraduate Medical Student, University of Aberdeen

Biography

Miss Emma Mary Bowden grew up in small town called Castle Douglas in Dumfries and Galloway, South West Scotland. She completed the Gateway to Medicine (G2M) course at the University of Aberdeen in 2018 and thus gained successful advancement on the MBChB degree at the University that year. Emma is now in her third year of her medical degree and has developed strong and passionate interests in the fields of; history of medicine, medical teaching and development, widening access and participation in medicine, and remote/rural medicine. Outside of academia, she is a keen equestrian with a passion for horses however she generally enjoy all outdoor pursuits/activities and particularly enjoy spending time back home in the picturesque region of Dumfries and Galloway.

Abstract

The existence and aetiology of male hysteria or 'hysteria masculina' was a hotly debated subject around the turn of the 20th century and hysteria itself as a medical diagnosis has had a turbulent and wavering past. Most intriguingly though, is that the diagnosis hysteria went through a revolutionary period in history to become a diagnosis attributable to both men and women alike. While the evolution of male hysteria is something well discussed by scholars and historians, few seem to go as far as to identify the true turning point in the masculinisation of the diagnosis. Henceforth, in my essay, I aimed to evaluate and analyse two key questions in the hope to provide clarity and confirmation concerning male hysteria. Firstly, I addressed the question 'How did the disease hysteria (meant to be historically typical of only women) develop into a disease also associated with men?'. Secondly, I explored the further question of 'What was the major turning point in the masculinisation of the diagnosis hysteria?'. The principal conclusion of my research inferred that the publication of Pierre Briquets 'Traité clinique et thérapeutique de l'Hystérie' in 1859 was the most significant turning point in the masculinisation of the diagnosis hysteria. However, my essay also further deduced that the history and development of the diagnosis hysteria itself, had a greater and broader implication to the fields of psychiatry and mental health. I would also like to take time to acknowledge the generous support of the John Blair Trust which greatly enabled my research and essay project.

2019-2020 Winners:

A History of The Bermuda Lunatic Asylum

Dr Hope Hughes, Foundation Year 1 Doctor, University Hospital Coventry and Graduate, University of Birmingham

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Biography

As a keen student of history throughout her time at school, Dr Hope Hughes was eager to find a medical school which presents opportunities to further this interest. Consequently, she was pleased to accept a place at Birmingham as she had read about the History of Medicine intercalation programme and was delighted to be offered a place on the intercalation in due course.

She found the intercalation year extremely enjoyable and intellectually stimulating, and through seminars and reading quickly developed particular interests in the history of medical institutions, and how medicine was practiced in the British Empire. Hope's research combined these two interests and allowed her to study in-depth the Bermuda Lunatic Asylum and draw a detailed picture of it through time. Whilst she is currently focusing on her training, she intends to continue to develop her knowledge and understanding of medical history in the future.

Abstract

In 1864, the Colonial Office published a report on the state of the British Empire's hospitals and lunatic asylums. It was deeply critical of the poor conditions in the majority of locations, but some of the strongest condemnation was reserved for the Bermuda Lunatic Asylum, described as 'perhaps the worst of all the cruelly ill-managed prisons for lunatics in the colonies'. The 1864 report has been the subject of numerous publications, but research focussed on the Bermuda Lunatic Asylum is limited.

The aim of the essay is to expand the historiography of colonial asylums through an account of this institution from its establishment in 1848 until 1914. It also aims to consider how 'moral' treatments were used and examine the key role played by the long-standing medical superintendent in improving the standards of care for psychiatric patients in Bermuda. Finally, it considers patient experiences within the asylum, focusing on race as a factor affecting admission and experiences of the asylum. Primary sources housed in the National Archives, the Bermuda National Archives and the Bermuda National Library form the basis for the essay. A range of secondary sources provide context and comparisons to the Bermuda Lunatic Asylum.

Spontaneous but dangerous: The History of Sneezing

Ms Janice Wai Man You, Penultimate Year Medical Student, UCL Medical School

Biography

Inspired by Mr Paul Kalanithi, Ms Janice Wai Man You has chosen to take up History of Medicine as her first year SSC module. Now in the penultimate year of medical school, she is passionate about academic surgery and medicine, research and medical education through designing posters, e-courses, volunteering, organising speaker events and workshops for the UCL Surgical Society and Medical Society. Alongside writing, Janice enjoys Table Tennis, playing the piano and some iPhone photography. (Twitter: @janyonie)

Abstract

Sneezing or sternutation, is an involuntary and convulsive forced expiration of air through the nose and mouth. It is now known that sneezing is one of the routes for aerosol transmission of infectious respiratory diseases. However, in ancient times, including 2nd Century BCE, and times of Hippocrates (460-370 BC) and Galen (129 -210 AD), apart from the recognition that sneezing can be both a symptom of disease or a sign of good health and recovery in medicine, it also symbolises good fortune and an omen in certain religions and cultures. This project seeks to trace back the historical records of sneezing from the ancient times to the end of the 20th Century, in order to determine the historical period when the role of sneezing as a route of disease transmission was starting to be realised, and the period in which formal research studies were performed to confirm this relationship. Because this project covered the history of sneezing over a significantly long timeline, the understanding of sneezing was systematically arranged to 6 stages for clarity. From this project, we see that the great shifts in the medical perception sneezing occurred in early 20th Century and was closely associated with the wide acceptance of the Germ Theory in the late 19th Century, the high mortality rates of the Influenza Pandemic (1918-1919) and the research in the common colds in early 20th Century. The early formal research studies on sneezing in relation to disease transmission could have commenced in the 1930s, and a statistical analysis revealed that the growth in the number of studies was the highest in the 1940s, followed by a gradual decrease from the 1940s to the 1990s. The implications of the discovery of the role of sneezing in aerosol transmission of diseases were vast for public health and infection control in the 21st Century. Particularly, the practice of precautionary health measures and design of hospital ventilation systems for preventing the spread of pathogens.

History of Neuroscience - From Conception to Renaissance

Dr Prabhjot Singh Malhotra, Foundation Year 1 Doctor, King's College Hospital

Biography

Dr Prabhjot Singh Malhotra is a Foundation Year 1 Doctor currently working in King's College Hospital, London. Dr Singh Malhotra holds an MSc Honors in Clinical Neurosciences awarded from King's College London, and an MBBS degree from Hull York Medical School. Dr Singh Malhotra has a keen interest in the study of neurosciences and is very focused on pursuing a career in Neurosurgery. Prabhjot believes it is extremely rewarding to learn the history of the field one aspires to work in, as the information obtained from past discoveries and methods of research is invaluable to understanding fundamental concepts that remain relevant today. Alongside medicine, Prabhjot likes to stay in shape by powerlifting, playing a lot of chess to keep the mind active and stay calm and relaxed by playing the piano.

Abstract

The history of brain studies shows us the similarity between human thoughtprocess across civilisations which lie centuries apart. It also reveals how research principles have developed across eras, resembling the maturation of humanity's scientific thinking. Alongside, we see a progression in society's cultural and ethical beliefs. Discussing this in relation to the history of neuroscience reveals why today's research principles and medical practice is effective at sustaining progress in the future.

This essay aims to present the history of neuroscience from its conception to the period of renaissance. In doing so, key aspects impeding the flow of research through each time period have been discussed in detail. This draws a parallel to the roadblocks experienced by today's research community and the resources available to overcome this. The evolution of scientific rationale through the course of time has been traced to uncover the thought-process that has proven most efficient. Therefore, we can recognise effective deductive-reasoning models and research techniques. This also sheds light on the significant impact laws and religion can have on research methodology, whilst culture and societal beliefs can directly influence the minds of researchers. Philosophical discussions through time regarding the function of the brain and consciousness have been discussed as well.

The Royal Navy, Cholera and Quarantine in the Nineteenth Century

Barbara Mair, Fourth Year Medical Student, Newcastle University

Biography

Barbara Mair is a former Royal Naval Dental Officer having trained at Bristol University and Britannia Royal Naval College. Deployed on operations including GRITROCK (Ebola outbreak) on board RFA ARGUS, and RUMAN (hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Caribbean) with 40 Commando Royal Marines. Now an Army Reserve Dental Officer and fourth-year Graduate Medical student at Newcastle University with a keen interest in Medical Humanities and military medicine.

Abstract

Aim: To explore the role of the Royal Navy in the application of quarantine during the Cholera outbreaks of the 19th century

This presentation explores the emergence of cholera, and the unsung contributions of Naval surgeons to both public health policy and research. By studying the time before epidemiology, we can begin to understand its true significance in modern medicine.

Primary sources will form the backbone of the argument that the Navy played a vital role in the implementation of quarantine and was a major contributor to research into the theories about cholera. With limited modern historical focus on this area of research, few interpretations from historians will be referred to. Instead, original documentation will predominantly be used, sourced from the National Archives, the National Maritime Museum and the Wellcome Collection in London among others. These will include original medical reports from surgeons on board warships, Boards of Health, the Royal College of Physicians and reports from Dr John Snow, the father of modern epidemiology

Only through looking back and reflecting on history can the Government, Doctors and the Military stop society from repeating the medical mistakes of the past.