

## **Were Arab doctors better than European doctors in the middle ages?**

**I**N the middle ages, there were many changes that would affect knowledge of medicine a lot. In the middle ages, lot of events occurred, the fall of the Roman Empire, the Black Death and Great Fire of London but during this time, knowledge of medicine was improving a lot in some parts of the world. This was mainly thanks to some doctors like Galen and Hippocrates but now there were new legends, doctors like Rhazes (al Rhasi) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina). Although knowledge of medicine was improving, it was on a brink of being lost forever. The Roman Empire collapsed and Saxons and Vikings destroyed everything Romans made including the universities and the libraries where the medical knowledge was kept. That's when the Arabs come in. The Arabs saved and kept few of the books written by Galen and Hippocrates and translated them. The medical knowledge was rescued from total loss.

Arab countries at this point had now more and better medical knowledge then European countries but as the middle ages went by, the Europeans will soon catch up. It was religion that mainly hindered medical knowledge in Europe but in the Middle East, Islamic Religious influence was actually helping the course of medicine as Islam encouraged Hygiene and Cleanliness. This was done by bathing once a week, brushing teeth, trimming nails, keep homes clean and keep healthy and sick people apart and so on but only thing that hindered medical knowledge due to Islam was that they weren't allowed to dissect the body. This wasn't a much of a problem as many ideas of the anatomy were already discovered anyway. Based on the Qu'ran, the Islamic Holy book, there were clear instructions on responsibilities such as rich providing for the poor and the healthy caring for sick, so this led to hospitals being built. There were many hospitals being built all over the Arab countries especially in Baghdad where they had sixty hospitals where at this point London had built one hospital. So far Islamic medical knowledge was far more advanced then the European medical knowledge as this point.

One of the doctors working in a Baghdad hospital was Rhazes (al-Razi). He made many discoveries which would help knowledge of medicine a lot. Rhazes was a Persian doctor who worked in hospitals of Baghdad around AD900. As medical knowledge was lost in Europe, Rhazes was one of few who saved the books and translated them. He put some of the ideas from the Greek doctors, such as Hippocrates advice of observing patients carefully and taking notes, into his own book, the 'Al-Hawi'. This advice led him to make a dramatic discovery of the difference between measles and smallpox. This proves that Rhazes and some other doctors can be able to identify a specific disease. Soon the 'Al-Hawi' was brought into Europe, straight away it became the most widely read medical book in Europe in the middle ages. Now the doctors in Muslim countries were able to get a clearer understanding of the causes of disease.

After Rhazes died, a new name in medical history was born and he turned out to be very popular person in the middle ages. He was Avicenna. Avicenna was born in Persia and was a famous philosopher and a physician. He wasn't known for much of his practice of medicine but he was more known for his medical writings. He wrote over 200 books including the ever popular 'Canon'. 'Canon' was a textbook which contained existing medical knowledge and discoveries. The book covered many

topics including diseases, fevers and recipes for remedies. As he practiced medicine, he advised doctors to take care when performing surgery so that open wounds did not become infected.

The Europeans had now got back the medical knowledge but still Religion hindered the knowledge of medical from advancing any further. As some evidence puts it, Arab doctors use more of a natural way to cure people while on the other hand the European doctors use more of a superstitious way to cure people. For example in the story "A Woman with a fever", an Arab doctor called Thabit treats a woman with a fever and advises her to stop eating hot food. Soon she gets better but then a European doctor arrives and claims she possessed with a devil, and orders to shave off her hair and let her eat anything she wants but that didn't work. So the European doctor cuts open her head in the shape of a cross until the bone was showing and rubbed salt into her head. The woman died. This clearly shows that European doctors were superstitious and the Arabian doctors weren't. The Europeans aren't as bad you think though. They used vinegar to wash a wound and that healed the wound so the European doctors did know something. The Doctors in Europe were getting to know the techniques of healing people from Arab doctors and now they were just as good as the Arabian doctors.

Although certain evidence show that Arab doctors were better than European doctors, I think the doctors were just as good as each other. European doctors never had much knowledge at the start of the middle ages as most medical knowledge was lost in Europe while Arab doctors saved the books containing medical knowledge and translated them. So at one point, Arab doctors had more medical knowledge than the European doctors but it was because of the fall of the Romans that left medical knowledge lost in Europe. As time went by, one way or another, slowly the knowledge of medicine was being brought into Europe. Now the discoveries of the Arabs were now being taught to the doctors in Europe. So my answer to this question is that, the doctors were just as good as each other, Europe started behind due to their own misfortune of the war and the fall of the Romans and Arab countries started ahead because they looked after books of medical knowledge. If the amount of medical knowledge was same everywhere in the world, there would have been more discoveries about medicine but same parts of the world, knowledge of medicine was hindered by religious beliefs.