Mapping Key areas of Medicine 20th Century

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| Ideas on Causes of Disease | Move away from a singular focus on prevention (through vaccination) to a multi-causal understanding of what caused disease, such as genetic reasons, environmental reasons and germs. Greater scientific understanding through extensive research and use of modern technology has led to much greater understanding of the causes of disease. The discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA in 1953 greatly helped understanding of genetic diseases, and helped lead to gene therapy as a treatment of disease. |
| Treatment | Treatment like causes developed significantly into a broader range of treatments, ranging from prevention and diagnosis (scans, X-rays, electron microscopes), to treatments including radiotherapy, chemotherapy, medicines manufactured by large multi-national pharmaceutical companies (from magic bullets – Salversan 606 in 1909 and Prontosil in 1932 – to penicillin in 1944), dialysis and technology to monitor health such as pacemakers and blood pressure monitors. Some alternative treatments are still used but these are not as common now as they were in the past. |
| Public Health | Some developments by the Liberal Government, with their “New Liberalism” ideology, including pensions from 1908 and National Insurance 1911. These gave financial security, so people could more easily afford medical help. Also improvements in nurses training, & school medical checks and free school lunches. Some improvement in housing with the ‘Homes for Heroes’ programme in 1919 and the interwar programme of slum clearance. Greater change happened after the Labour Government introduced the NHS in 1948 and dev. of council housing, with free health care for all and government funding for training and research. 1970s-80s single issue postercampaigns. |
| Training of Doctors | From the start of the 20th century, doctors had to qualify and register with the General Medical Council. There was little specialisation and there were limited opportunities for doctors to receive any further training. During the 20th century, especially as the NHS was set up, more doctors specialised. GPs became more aware of the need to update their knowledge and understand new developments. Medical journals, conferences and the internet all helped. Doctors now train for 7 years. Paramedics are trained by the NHS to assess patients and take action whenever possible before they take patients to hospital. They are important for dealing with emergencies like strokes and heart attacks. Nurses have a mixture of academic and practical training, and must hold a diploma or degree in nursing. They must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and must pass further exams before they can administer drugs or chemotherapy. Almost half of doctors are now women. |
| Understanding the body | Dissection and practical study of bodies is a compulsory part of doctors’ training. Endoscopes (cameras that can be passed inside the body) and x-rays give us a good understanding of the workings of the living human body. Advanced technology allows surgeons to open up the body and perform complex operations while the patient is under anaesthetic, which allows surgeons to see inside the body. Keyhole surgery can be done through a small hole using cameras without opening the whole body up. Genetic understanding of the human body developed with the identification of the double-helix structure of DNA in 1953 and the mapping of the human genome in the Human Genome Project in 1990. |
| Hospitals | The creation of the NHS in 1948 made hospitals provide free treatment for all, as well as a blood transfusion service and an ambulance service. Some new hospitals as well as 1,000 new operating theatres were built and additional equipment was provided. The NHS had a major impact on people’s health, as previously only people covered by the national insurance system could see a GP free of charge. There are many university hospitals where medical students train. |