

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

ETHICS IN ANCIENT GREEK MEDICINE

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ABSTRACT

The ethical medical code which was born in ancient Greece had durable grounds and survived in the medical profession until today. These ethical standards of the physicians were gradually formulated during antiquity.

Keywords: ethics, ancient Greek medicine, Hippocratic oath.

The term „physician“ is found for the first time in the terracotta plates of the Linear B writing found in Pylos, dated to 1250 BC. That is an unquestionable sign of the existence of several citizens in this prehistoric period, who acted as physicians with special mission to diagnose and heal ill people. It is obvious that, even in the early society, an ethical code was also present in the practice of this profession, because the Mycenaean society as this of Pylos was thoroughly organized, as we can infer from the rest archaeological findings. Nevertheless, the earliest known medical code in ancient Greece was the so-called „Hippocratic Oath“. Although this text was written probably by a student of Hippocrates during

RÉSUMÉ

L'éthique dans la médecine de la Grèce ancienne

Le code médical éthique qui est né dans la Grèce antique avait des motifs durables et avait survécu dans la profession médicale jusqu'à présent. Ces normes éthiques des médecins ont été progressivement formulées pendant l'Antiquité.

Mots-clés: éthique, ancienne médecine grecque, serment d'Hippocrate.

the 4th c. BC, it reflects the basic ethical principles of the medical profession in ancient Greek antiquity. According to it, the physician should not kill anyone, should not perform an abortion, should not help someone to die, should not tell to others what he saw or hear from a patient, should not perform a lithotomy and not be involved in a relationship with a patient¹. These basic principles still are the standard ethical code of the physicians all over the world. But in order to reach this ethical code, ethical standards of the physicians were gradually formulated in the passing of the time. After the Mycenaean epoch, the Aristocratic Epoch of the Archaic Period of the 8th to the 5th c BC born the begging of the rational

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medicine, after the teaching of the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, part of them were physicians. In those days, a physician should have had an education given by these philosophers and should represent the aristocratic prototype of the Good and Kind, that is the ethical standards had been an indispensable characteristic of the physicians². In the passing in the Polis-State of the 5th century, the physician was an essential agent in the well-being of the community, in which he attracted the interest as a guarantor of the ethical principles, in order to offer his service to any member of the community. From the Hellenistic years and further more, the ethical standards as described in the Hippocratic Oath were essential in the practice of medicine in multinational societies. From ancient Greek medical texts, we learnt that these physicians treated equally the citizens of a town, the slaves, the foreigners, the rich and the poor, without discriminations. In addition, we should underline that ancient Greek physicians treated the mentally ill persons as sick persons and not as criminals, staying

by them in order to offer their help³. Therefore, the ethical medical code which was born in ancient Greece had durable grounds and survived in the medical profession until today.

Compliance with Ethics Requirements:

„The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this article“

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