

## Why we need to understand and study medical history

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Although healthcare sciences often have some of the longest degrees and postgraduate components, there is often very little medical history taught.

This can give the impression that the history of healthcare isn't important. After all, if you can't find time to fit in one lecture on the subject in 5 years then surely it must be less useful than the Krebs cycle?

But nothing could be further from the truth. Medical history isn't just useful, it is vital to our development as individuals and as a field of study.

Firstly, as the old adage goes, those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. Medical science and ethics are replete with circular discussions and stunted conversations that have been going on for generations. However, there can be no greater example than the current pandemic. Had we studied and analysed the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918, we would have been in a much better position to be prepared for Covid 19. Instead, we kept repeating the patently false mantra that this pandemic was "unprecedented."

Then, there's the humility and context that comes from learning about our history. It places you within a timeline and in relationship to those that came before you. Can we see far, if we don't even know that there are giants whose shoulders we could be perching ourselves on? Learning about history quickly disabuses someone of the notion that they know everything. It instils humility. If Galen and Ibn Sina could be wrong, so could we.

Finally, learning from history is immensely motivational. You realise that Medicine isn't a dry subject where we must memorise as many facts or figures as possible. It's the pursuit of uplifting peoples lives through a combination of study, observation and constant incremental improvement punctuated by periods of sheer brilliance. Learning about the struggles of previous generations and how they overcame them is fuel for those long hard years toiling away in a university or clinic. You are not merely a cog in an unfeeling and unthinking machine. You are the heir to a beautiful tradition that works to improve the lives of our fellow human beings.