



Requiem for Hippocratic Medicine?

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Editorial

The foundations of Western medicine are based in the Hippocratic School. The diffusion of the Hippocratic physiology that Galen achieved spread this knowledge throughout the Roman Mediterranean: What centuries ago had emerged on the Aegean is lands had become universal; it was the first globalization of medicine. And from there, it penetrated all of medieval Europe, being the undisputed truth for more than ten centuries. Galen contributed with new observations and experimentation to the magnificent humoral theory, preserving the exquisite individualization of diagnosis and treatment. For the Hippocratic thought, each patient became ill in a particular way, in each person could be altered the humoral harmony that ensured his health, but in a unique way. Each person, according to their own characteristics, circumstances and habits, fell ill in their own way. It was up to the doctor to recognize the dyscrasia that was specific for each individual. Hence, it was understood that there are patients, not diseases. That is, the doctor in front of the patient traces the history of the specific disease of the patient, rather than drawing the natural history of a disease that can be common to many. What happened over time? With the anatomical knowledge obtained first in the Renaissance period, shortly after with microscopy and then experimentation from the 19th century onwards, doctors and scientists began to observe and measure the physical alterations caused by diseases. And they were writing down common facts to different people, recognizing that, with all the variations, it was the same disease. Moreover, they made an effort to find patterns that would allow them to establish a diagnosis that could be shared by countless people. We get to know the diseases and their natural history. Each individual is susceptible to contracting the same disease, which is discovered by symptoms and signs, and now a day, by a huge array of measurements and images. Furthermore, scoring systems have been developed in different areas that indicate the probability of a particular subject to have a specific disease. For this, biochemical determinations, serological markers, blood counts, among many others have been used. Then came X-rays and then an enormous variety of images, such as MRI and ultrasound. With the COVID-19 pandemic, although had already been developing in some specialties and medical areas, the incorporation and contributions of Artificial Intelligence has speed up, with the processing of a huge amount of information. For example, a diagnosis can be carried out by images that, included in an extremely robust computer system, allow the recognition of a disease with an information analysis capacity infinitely greater than any person could process individually. This enormous technological advance will undoubtedly modify our way of making a diagnosis, in many cases with greater accuracy, and will allow remote places to have access to the information processed in those centers. We are experiencing a new globalization of medicine and a new way of approaching each patient. Does this mean that medicine is going to become more dehumanized? Does it mean the end of medicine based on Hippocratic principles? I think not, as in any ways of using technology, it will depend on how it is utilized. But definitely not, if we are able to continue holding our patient's hands and looking in to each other's eyes.

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