

Medicine

You are in the House of Life, where ancient Egyptian physicians studied medicine. You are looking at a wood carving honoring Hesire, one of Egypt's first doctors. Hesire was one of the chief court doctors during the reign of Djoser, a pharaoh during the Old Kingdom period.

Egyptians have practiced medicine for hundreds of years. For centuries, Egyptians who wished to study medicine had special training. Doctors attended special schools after they completed their general education. There they learned about the symptoms of many illnesses and how to diagnose and treat them. Ancient Egyptian doctors had a clear understanding of the organs and structure of the body, including the importance of the heart. They also used the body's pulse rate to determine a person's health.

Ancient Egyptians believed in treating health problems with a combination of magic and medicine. They thought people became sick when a disease or illness caused worms to form inside the body. They believed magic spells, medicine, or a combination of both were needed to drive the worms out and cure the patient. Doctors had prescriptions and treatments for many illnesses, such as eye problems, tumors, and snake bites. They often used parts of plants, and herbs such as garlic, in their treatments. Magicians were used to cast magic spells when other treatments were limited or did not provide a cure. Doctors treated injuries and wounds with bandages and stitches, but did not perform surgery.

In all areas relating to childbirth, ancient Egyptians relied more on magic and help from the Gods than on medicine. Several Gods were called upon to help women to conceive and to bear children safely. Prayers, charms, and spells were used to protect a mother during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as to protect babies against childhood diseases and dangers.

Discussion Question: What techniques did the ancient Egyptian doctors use to treat health problems?