

News

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****UT Southwestern salutes "The Art of
Healing in Ancient Greece"

Greece, the land that gave us Hippocrates--the father of modern medicine--also left a rich legacy in a variety of fields of medical concern today.

Five of the world's foremost medical historians will share that legacy with Dallas during a one-day symposium on ancient Greek medicine at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas on Thursday, April 5.

The symposium, entitled "The Art of Healing in Ancient Greece," is free and open to the public. It marks UT Southwestern's participation in the Dallas World Salute to Greece and Her Legacy, a community-wide tribute that begins March 30 and continues for the rest of the year.

John M. Riddle, Ph.D., professor and head of the Division of University Studies at North Carolina State University, will open the symposium with a talk on ancient Greek physicians' use of herbal and mineral substances as oral contraceptives and early-stage abortifacients.

"Evidence shows that the Classical Greeks knew of hormonal oral contraceptives and early-stage abortifacients," says Dr. Riddle. "The ancient physicians administered abortifacients, but were careful about the health of the mother."

Contrary to many translations of the Hippocratic Oath, in the

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original Greek the oath did not categorically prohibit a physician from administering an abortifacient, Dr. Riddle goes on to say.

In a talk entitled "Science, Taboo and Philosophy in Hellenistic Medicine," Heinrich von Staden, Ph.D., professor of classics and comparative literature at Yale University, will explore what he calls "both the constraints exercised upon science during this period and the forces that contributed to the overcoming of religious, moral, aesthetic and other traditional constraints," offering a "case study in the nature of the essential tension between tradition and innovation that informs scientific progress."

The development of academic medical education also has roots in ancient Greece. Vivian Nutton, Ph.D., a faculty member at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London, England, will discuss the classical style of academic medical education in the form of a commentary on a text from the past--a teaching technique that persisted well into the 18th century--using as an example Appolonius of Citium's Commentary on Joints. In the form of a "dialogue" with a predecessor, Appolonius' commentary is illustrated by original drawings of orthopedic procedures, some of which survived in a Greek manuscript from the ninth century A.D.

Although Galen of Pergamon is known for his works on anatomy and physiology, his use of animal dissections to develop his understanding of human anatomy by analogy is less widely known. John Scarborough, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Classics and the School of Pharmacy at the University of Wisconsin, will discuss why Galen's dissections were to become so influential.

Dietetics, by ancient Greek definition, is the study of the

interaction of the external and internal environments in achieving health. Wesley D. Smith, Ph.D., associate professor of classical studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, will close the symposium with a talk on "Hippocratic Dietetics," which he calls "the great scientific achievement of medicine in the classical period of Greece."

Dr. James Robinson from Guy's Hospital in London, an adjunct professor of medical history at UT Southwestern and Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, is in charge of the symposium, which begins at 8 a.m. Thursday, April 5, in the Zale Lecture Hall (D1.600) on the UT Southwestern Medical Center campus, 5323 Harry Hines Blvd. at Butler St. in Dallas.

An unusual exhibit of pharmaceutical herbs like those used by Hippocrates and discussed in his writings also will be on display in the UT Southwestern Library's History of Health Sciences Room. The unique collection of dried, mounted herbs is being donated to Southwestern by Niki Goulandris of the Goulandris Natural History Museum in Kifissia, Greece, in gratitude for Dallas's salute to her homeland.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.