Wound Care in Anatolia

In previous issues, Dealley has reviewed the evolution of wound care in ancient medieval times. In this paper we will be evaluating wound care in Anatolia prior to the Renaissance and the contributions of Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna.

Before the Renaissance, wound care in Anatolia was mainly influenced by Iranian and Turkish scientists. Asia Minor was at the intersection of both the geographical and cultural entities that formed the basis of both the Islamic and European civilizations to come.

HIPPOCRATES

Hippocrates was born on Kos (an island in the eastern Aegean Sea) in 460 B.C. He is seen as one of the first to understand that medicine is a science and he founded the first medical school in Kos. Among his many aphorisms he suggested, “Those diseases which medicines do not cure, iron (the knife): yews, those which iron cannot cure, fire cures; and those which fire cannot cure, are to be reckoned wholly incurable.” He used tar, honey, wine and vinegar for ointment preparation and cleaning, he also stressed the role of debridement in the treatment of chronic wounds.

For some lower extremity ulcers Hippocrates realized that a strict diet, devoid of some foods, helped the wound heal earlier. He also rinsed wounds with vinegar and wiped them with greasy cotton cloths.

Hippocrates also advised physicians to make a phlebotomy (bloodletting) when there are varices on the leg. He clearly defined the indications and the conditions to make vascular interventions. He advised leg elevation with the words: “In every recent ulcer, except in the belly, it is expedient to cause blood to flow from it abundantly and as may seem reasonable; for thus will the wound and the adjacent parts be less attached with inflammation. And, in like manner, from old ulcers, especially if situated in the leg, in a toe or finger, more than in any other part of the body. For when the blood flows they become drier and less in size, as being thus dried up.”

GALEN

Galen was another famous Ionic physician. He was born in Pergamum (an ancient city in Western Anatolia, now in Turkey) in 131 AD. He used wine and some herbal oils to rinse wounds. He was one of the most famous and knowledgeable physicians of the ancient world. He was a prolific writer, with over 300 works to his credit. He was also a skilled anatomist, and his knowledge of the human body was highly regarded.

AVICENNA (980-1037)

Avicenna was a Turkish scientist whose teachings affected the whole of Islamic and European medicine. He studied theology, logic, natural science, mathematics, geometry, astronomy and metaphysics. He was influenced by the views of Aristotle and Farabi on nature and he was also affected by Galen’s writings and teachings. During his practice, he treated the Samanid Turkish state ruler, Nuh II ibn Manṣūr. Mansur presented him with the large library of Bukhara as a reward and he was astonished with the vast amount of literature it contained. This opportunity led him to collect and write on the current sciences of his day. He wrote more than 450 manuscripts; unfortunately only about 200 are still available. His “Canon of Medicine,” “El kamar,” and “La herbe” are among his most important manuscripts. The Canon of Medicine comprised five books, one of which is one of the oldest pharmacopoeias known. In “The Canon of Medicine,” he described...
According to Avicenna, the main objective of wound care is to prevent pus from interrupting healing. Unclean wounds should be treated with white or yellow alum and lime. If this fails, cauterization may be needed to clean the wound. The wound should be kept closed with clean cotton clothes. When the wound is cleaned, caustic “drugs” might be helpful to make the wound contract and form a scab. Wet wounds should be dried and dry wounds should be moistened. After an abscess is drained, the surgeon should avoid greasy ointments and dry or wince-wetted cotton cloths or sponges should be used to cover the wound. He also advised heating surgical instruments in a flame before use.

**EBU BEKIR MUHAMMED IBN ZEKERIYA EL RAZI (RHazes) (854-932)**

His reputation as the “Galen of Islam” was well justified. He was the first designer of surgical instruments and wrote more than 50 medical texts. He suggested cleaning wounds with alcohol. He also described the basis of amputation surgery in cases of failure to cure a chronic extremity wound. He used cattle gut as suture material.

**SERAFFEDEDDIN SABUNCUOGLU (1383-1468)**

Sabuncuoglu was a recognized expert in the cauterization of chronic wounds. In his manuscripts he described ointments made from honey, vinegar and some herbal seeds for the treatment of infected wounds. Some ointments made of the above ingredients were described in his manuscripts for chronic infected wounds. He also used an ointment made of snake venom and wild pear for the chemical debidement of necrotic wounds as well as designing surgical instruments.

This paper has focused on the contributions of Anatolian physicians to wound care. Anatolia geographically joined two continents and this allowed its physicians to bridge and combine the vast knowledge of both Far East Asia and Islamic medicine and also to influence medical development in western civilizations. Anatolia, as a result, became home to many legendary scientists. Those scientists were the founders and the designers of modern health care. It is interesting to note how many of the principles and practices they developed still underpin many aspects of modern wound care today, and that the views they proposed are quite close to where we are now. We should be grateful for their efforts to improve people’s lives and to record their knowledge so that we can still benefit from their experiences today.

**References**

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