

## The transmission of health practices (1500 to 2000)

Workshop with Prof. Dr Robert Jütte and Prof. Dr Martin Dinges  
Institute for the History of Medicine of the Robert Bosch Foundation  
Stuttgart, June 25 to 27

The biennial Open Anglo-Dutch-German Workshop', a cooperation between the Institute for the History of Medicine of the Robert Bosch Foundation, the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine, the 'Centre of the History of Medicine' (Warwick) and the 'University Medical Centre' (Utrecht) took place at the Institute for the History of Medicine of the Robert Bosch Foundation this year. Its theme was the transmission of medical knowledge and health practices from early modern times to the present.

*Angela Davis (Coventry)* opened the workshop with a lecture on the situation of women experiencing maternity in Great Britain after 1945. She presented how women acquired knowledge of pregnancy, childbirth and infant care.

*Willemijn Ruberg (Utrecht)* explored the question of who, in early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Holland, had the expertise to determine whether a woman had been raped and how this might affect her health. She argued that it was mostly the mothers who became aware of changes in their daughters' bodies and who noticed the first signs of venereal disease.

*Susanne Hoffmann (Stuttgart)* based her contribution on the observation that, around 1900, traditional dental care was replaced by the new preventive dental hygiene. The speaker investigated how the new approach was implemented within the population. Among the lower classes and in rural areas the transformation lasted until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Eberhard Wolff (Zürich/Stuttgart)* examined the transmission of medical knowledge, using the example of naturopathy. Based on the patient records of a follower of the so-called 'Ordnungstherapie' that was conceived by the Swiss physician Max Bircher-Benner. Wolff showed how knowledge and practices were promulgated.

*Gemma Blok (Amsterdam)* spoke about the treatment of addiction. She introduced two Dutch organisations that had different objectives. The International Order of the Good Templars – in many ways a forerunner of the Alcoholics Anonymous – was founded in America in 1851 and soon became popular in Europe. The 'Medical Service for Hard Drug Users' applied different strategies. The institution was founded in 1976 when Holland was in the grip of a 'heroin epidemic'. Its aim was to reduce drug consumption rather than achieve total abstinence as the Good Templars did.

*Stephen Snelders and Frans J. Meijman (Amsterdam)* addressed the transmission of medical knowledge among lay persons in Holland between 1900 and 2000. They showed that they were not passive recipients of medical knowledge, but decided for themselves whether to accept or reject medical concepts. Many of them empowered themselves according to Snelders and Meijman.

In order to show how, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, medical knowledge was spread by the media and health concepts were constructed, *Sünje Prühlen (Hamburg)* used the example of the physician Bartholomaeus Metlinger who had published his book 'Regiment of young children' in Augsburg in 1493. The volume is considered to be the first German language work on paediatrics and taught parents how to care for their infants and young children.

The topic of *Carmen M. Mangion (Manchester)* was the acquisition of knowledge by the Catholic women religious orders in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Only few of the nursing sisters had received formal medical training as the church law of the time did not allow it. As a consequence the nursing sisters founded informal, local and international, 'knowledge networks'. Most important was the pastoral care that they carried out independently of the physician.

*Karin Nolte (Würzburg)* presented the parish work of the deaconesses. Rooted as he was in traditional Protestantism the German pastor Theodor Fliedner (1800-1864) who opened the first deaconesses' hospital near Düsseldorf, saw a connection between sickness, poverty and faithlessness. He tried to find access to the souls of the poor by caring for the sick. The letters that the deaconesses wrote to Fliedner and his wife give insight into the deaconesses' everyday life among the poor.

*Andreas Weigl (Wien)* described the rise and 'fall' of female health care workers in Austria in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because of the high mortality rate of infants the government had made special health care workers available. It was their expressed aim to improve the health situation of children and adolescents. As part of their tasks they had to educate the mothers and teach them to fulfil their tasks and duties.

Using the example of the Dutch tuberculosis movement, *Alice Juch (Velp)* demonstrated how difficult it was to bring medical knowledge and the corresponding preventive measures to the lower social classes. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a 'tuberculosis movement' was active in the Netherlands that specialised on the treatment of poor tuberculosis patients. The movement was not very successful. Although Robert Koch had discovered the tubercle bacillus in 1882, only a few physicians accepted that his discovery was really what caused this disease. Up to the 1930s, a number of physicians still thought that tuberculosis was a hereditary disease.

*John Stewart (Glasgow)* introduced 'British Child Guidance' where professional and lay knowledge came together. This organisation was a medical-psychiatric initiative that had been established after World War I first in the United States and then also in Great Britain and Europe. The basic premise of this organisation was that each child, no matter how normal he or she might appear on the outside, experienced maladjustment at one stage or another in his or her life. If the problem was not recognized it could lead to further problems in later life. The fact that the young patients would encounter representatives of three professional groups, psychiatrists, psychologists and (psychiatric) social workers, turned out to be problematic.

*Karen Buckle (London)* reported on how opticians in Britain in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century conveyed knowledge and information on eye sight to their clients. She explored the means that opticians had at their disposal for diagnosing deteriorated

vision as well as the controversial optical theories. Buckle interpreted the development against the background of the scientific revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*Vanessa Heggie (Cambridge)* showed that specialist medical knowledge remained a taboo despite its promotion by the media. Using the example of British sport she explained that the British public tended to not take advantage of professional medical advice. Still today the general impression is that sportspeople managed without medical help. Myths about sports have played an important part in the construction of the British national identity.

*Andreas Golob (Graz)* dealt with the media of health education in the later enlightenment era. From the repertoire he drew on, Johann Jacob Gabriel, a Catholic priest and catechist, stood out with his Socratic stories, a very early example of a collection entirely devoted to health issues. Contextualisation was achieved mostly through the description of pastoral tasks within the health care system during the Habsburg monarchy around 1800.

The final presentation was by *Harry Oosterhuis (Maastricht)* who described the change in attitude towards homosexuality that occurred in the Catholic communities in Holland in the 1950s and 60s. He showed how the discourse among the medical profession influenced the views of the Catholic clergy. A dialogue conducted among priests, physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists and Catholic homosexuals led to the social and psychological re-evaluation of homosexuality which had so far been regarded as sinful and pathological.