

History of Nursing/Middle Ages

The collapse of the Roman Empire represented the dissolution of the slave social order and the gradual rise of feudalism. Social life reflected deep differences between social classes. **The church** becomes a new and powerful element in society. The ideology of **Christianity** became a source of consolidating the power of the masters and a tool for maintaining the obedience of serfs and their misery - both economically, socially and culturally. This conditioned the health status of the lower social groups of the population

Healing and caring for the sick became an instrument of the church. She laid the foundations of **monastic medicine** associated with caring for the basic needs of sick, disabled, poor and suffering people. Monastery medicine applied both medical and surgical treatment, as well as treatment with the help of a proper lifestyle, including diet. The development of orders and congregations with a charitable and nursing focus was primarily influenced by the decision of Pope Gregory the Great in the 9th century, who in 817 ordered monasteries to care for the poor, disabled and sick.

Wars have always had a great influence on the development of nursing. A large number of wounded soldiers, mass infections due to the very poor hygienic conditions of the infirmaries and insufficient knowledge of the medical staff caused an increased need for medical and nursing care. For example, previously contaminated wounds were mostly fatal. In addition to a large number of dead and wounded, the cause of the defeat of many armies were **epidemics - plague and other infections**, that broke out due to non-compliance with hygiene rules. Often more soldiers were killed by disease than by the enemy.

The Crusades led in the years 1095-1121 by Western Europeans against Muslims were very significant from a nursing point of view. They led to the creation of well-organized military nursing orders to care for the crusaders. Among the most famous military nursing orders were **the Knights of Malta** and the Knights of St. Lazarus. These orders built many infirmaries in which not only soldiers but also pilgrims who fell ill on their way to the Holy Land were treated. Many nursing traditions have their origins in **military nursing**, which dates back to the days of the Holy Wars. These include strict morals, visits with doctors and the way treatment units are laid out, with large rooms for lighter patients, side rooms for more serious patients and boxes for critically ill patients.

The following articles describe nursing during the Middle Ages:

- Historical personalities in nursing from the Middle Ages
- Care of the sick during medieval epidemics
- Regulae nursing

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FROM TITLE PAGE OF "LONDONS LAMENTATION," 1641.

A seventeenth-century engraving depicting a plague epidemic