



Medical Consulting by Letter in France, 1665-1789 (The History of Medicine in Context)

Robert, Mr Weston

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Ailing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French men and women, members of their families, or their local physician or surgeon, could write to high profile physicians and surgeons seeking expert medical advice. This study, the first full-length examination of the practice of consulting by letter, provides a cohesive portrayal of some of the widespread ailments of French society in the latter part of the early modern period. It explores how and why changes occurred in the relationships between those who sought and those who provided medical advice.

Previous studies of epistolary medical consulting have limited attention to the output of one or two practitioners, but this study uses the consultations of around 100 individual practitioners from the mid-seventeenth century to the time of the Revolution to give a broad picture of patients and physicians perceptions of illnesses and how they should be treated on a day-to-day basis. It makes a unique contribution to the history of medicine, as no other study has been undertaken in the consulting by letter of surgeons, as opposed to physicians. It is shown that the well-known disputation between physicians and surgeons tells only a part of the history; whereas in fact, necessity required that these two 'professions' had to work together for the patients' good.

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