Medical Practices on Sultana

Medical practices in the 18th century were primitive compared to today's standards. In Sultana's era, doctors had no knowledge of germs or the causes of infection. Many physicians had very poor training and limited knowledge of the human body. As a result, many men died from wounds that today would be easily treated and cured with a simple shot or vaccine.

One of the biggest problems on naval ships was infection. If a sailor received a wound on his arm or leg that became badly infected, Sultana's surgeon had no choice but to cut off, or amputate, the man's limb to prevent the infection from spreading to the heart. This painful operation was completed without the use of pain killers! Since surgeons often performed amputations with tools that were not properly cleaned, there was still a good chance that the sailor would die from new infections that resulted from the operation.

Amputation saw, or Bone saw   Screw tourniquet   Surgical knife

Another problem aboard Royal Navy ships was disease. Because sailors lived in tight quarters very close to one another, diseases spread very quickly and could easily wipe out entire crews. Without the use of antibiotics, doctors had no way to prevent this from happening. One technique that was used to "treat" illnesses was bleeding the patient. This was done by puncturing the sailor's skin and draining his blood into a bowl. Another way that doctors bled patients was by using leeches! Doctors believed that by getting rid of the "bad blood" in the body they could rid the person of their sickness. Unfortunately, this almost always did the patient more harm than good.

It wasn't until the invention of antibiotics in the 1900s that doctors began to truly master the treatment of illness, disease and infection. Luckily, today we live in an age where physicians don't often need to perform amputations or bleed their patients to save lives.

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NAME: _____   DATE: _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: Read the text on the previous page, then answer the following questions in complete sentences. Write your answers on the lines provided.

1. What were two reasons that patients in the 18th century died from wounds or illnesses that could easily be treated today?

   _____

   _____

2. If a sailor's arm became badly infected, what would happen to his limb?

   _____

   _____

3. Why was disease such a problem on Royal Navy ships?

   _____

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4. Why was one method used to "treat" illnesses?

   _____

   _____

5. What invention in the 1900s allowed doctors to effectively treat illness, disease, and infection?

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