

THE EVOLUTION OF MEDICAL PROVISION IN EUROPEAN CITIES, FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Section: Main session
Period: Medieval/Early modern

How did the structures and form of provision of medical services develop in European cities from the Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century? In what ways did the demand for medical services among the population change? And how did the distinctive characteristics of urban settings and individual cities shape the ways in which health care was provided to their inhabitants? Cities have long been recognized as nodal points in medical systems, containing concentrations of practitioners, medical institutions, and training alongside high numbers of sick inhabitants. However, recent work on health care has begun to reveal radical changes in the supply and demand for medical services in some parts of early modern Europe. These changes were intertwined with developments in international and local trade systems, consumption patterns and welfare institutions, including poor relief and hospitals. The aim of this session is to identify and explore those changes in health care provision that occurred in cities, with a view to uncovering the distinctive trajectory of systems of health care in urban contexts, cities' roles as centres of trade and production of medical goods and services, and city inhabitants' evolving patterns of engagement with commercial, state and community suppliers of medical care. We are particularly interested in papers that develop new methodologies or explore new sources for analysing medical provision, with a view to offer new comparative perspectives. Papers may focus across the full array of medical provision, from assistance and hospital care to individual transactions between individuals and their social groups and practitioners.

Suggested themes:

- Measuring health care over time: how can historians measure levels of health care provision within the city, whether at an individual or institutional level, within the household or an hospital?
- Urban geographies of health care provision: how was health care organized within the city? What was the city's role in providing healthcare to its hinterland? What role did cities play in redistributing medical services and commodities, such as drugs globally traded and locally retailed?
- Urban health care providers: shifts in who provided medical services in cities, how their work was organised, and the services and commodities that were provided?
- The urban sick: how did patients' demands for medicine change over time? How was demand shaped by wealth, age and gender?
- Institutional health care provision: how did city regulation and provision of healthcare develop? What were the role of smaller civic groups and institutions, such as guilds or congregations in providing health care?