

## **Paul Ehrlich (1854 - 1915) - forerunner of modern medicine**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The centenary of Paul Ehrlich's death provides an opportunity to remind ourselves of one of the internationally outstanding medical figures of his day. Despite winning the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1908 and the powerful influence of his concepts and discoveries on today's daily practice of medicine, his name has almost vanished from our historical landscape. This is in marked contrast to some of his contemporaries eg Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur.

Ehrlich's work was driven by his concept that physical chemistry was the basis of understanding biology and disease at a cellular level, and that therefore this concept was also a means of developing new therapies. The two main fields to which he applied his concept were infection and immunology. At the outset of his career very little was available for treating infections, then the commonest overall cause of death, but his work led to the development of antisera and chemotherapy for treating infections, notably salvarsan for syphilis. In parallel he developed his theory of humoral immunity which laid the foundation of understanding antigen-antibody interaction.

Ehrlich's fundamental ideas and discoveries have informed medical research and practice continuously from his times to ours. Today's development of agents to treat infections, inflammation and malignancy are firmly based on Ehrlich's work from screening to molecular modelling.

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