

Seminal Events in Medical Education

Medicine has been practised and taught since prehistorical times; primitive communities still pass on learning exclusively on a basis of master and pupil although it remains an important part of medical education. The first major development was writing with evidence from both Sumeria and Egypt that knowledge was kept in written form. Sumerian tablets show that this was accompanied by systematic instruction in institutions.

Written texts were copied by scribes until the advent of the printing press in the 15th century. This allowed a more rapid spread of knowledge and books that questioned the Galenic view of medicine. The need to provide a faster route for new ideas led to the establishment of medical journals. Medical education in Britain remained fragmented and uncontrolled until the medical act of 1858 established the GMC with responsibility of ensuring medical practitioners were adequately trained. British medical schools were only brought (reluctantly) into the university system following the Flexner report.

More recent developments such as the computer, the internet and fibreoptics have had major impacts on the way in which students and postgraduates learn. History shows us that Medicine needs to embrace developments in the wider world while being alert to the dangers of abuse.