Medicine by Observation

How Hippocratic writers approached illness and care

AWH.C.6.4.C "Medicine: Hippocrates"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details showing how physicians gathered evidence, and circle ideas about natural causes or surroundings so you can explain the Hippocratic approach to medicine.

A New Way to Ask About Illness

1 In a Greek town around 400 BCE, a patient arrives with a fever. A healer influenced by Hippocrates would ask when it began, watch how it changed, and consider the patient's food, sleep, and surroundings. Such details mattered because an illness might follow a pattern rather than strike at random. Hippocrates practiced medicine on the island of Kos and became associated with a group of medical writings called the Hippocratic Corpus. Scholars believe different authors wrote these works over time. The writings offer a window into Greek attempts to study illness through careful observation, even though their explanations were not always correct.

2 Some Greeks believed seizures were a punishment sent by a god. In a work called *On the Sacred Disease*, a Hippocratic writer argued that this condition had a natural cause, just like other illnesses. The writer did not discover the cause of seizures, but the argument changed what counted as a useful question: What happens in the body? Another work, *Airs, Waters, Places*, linked health to climate, water, and local living conditions. A physician could compare patients in different places to look for patterns. These ideas did not make ancient medicine modern, but they encouraged explanations that people could investigate.

3 Treatment and conduct also mattered. Hippocratic writings urged physicians to track symptoms and adjust care to a patient's condition. They sometimes advised attention to diet and rest, but they also included mistaken theories about the body's fluids. The Hippocratic Oath, a text from this tradition, set out duties such as avoiding harm and protecting private information learned during treatment. Its exact relationship to Hippocrates is uncertain, and not every ancient physician followed it. Today, doctors use tests and treatments unavailable to Greek healers. Still, observing patients, asking about their surroundings, and discussing duties to patients remain important parts of medical practice.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why would a healer influenced by Hippocrates ask when a fever began and watch how it changed?

2. How did the argument in *On the Sacred Disease* change the kinds of questions a physician might ask about seizures? Include a limit of that argument.

3. How could comparing patients in different places help a physician investigate illness?

4. What duty in the Hippocratic Oath concerns a patient's trust, and why should historians be careful about linking that duty directly to Hippocrates?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a brief case involving an ancient Greek patient not described in the passage. In four or five sentences, show how a physician in the Hippocratic tradition might observe symptoms, investigate a possible natural or environmental cause, act responsibly toward the patient, and face one limit of ancient medicine.

ANSWER KEY

Medicine by Observation

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.6.4.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details showing how physicians gathered evidence, and circle ideas about natural causes or surroundings so you can explain the Hippocratic approach to medicine. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why would a healer influenced by Hippocrates ask when a fever began and watch how it changed?	**Tracking the fever could reveal a pattern in the illness and help the healer adjust care to the patient's condition.**
2	How did the argument in *On the Sacred Disease* change the kinds of questions a physician might ask about seizures? Include a limit of that argument.	**It encouraged questions about natural processes in the body rather than divine punishment. The writer had not discovered the cause of seizures.**
3	How could comparing patients in different places help a physician investigate illness?	**The physician could look for patterns linking illness to differences in climate, water, or local living conditions.**
4	What duty in the Hippocratic Oath concerns a patient's trust, and why should historians be careful about linking that duty directly to Hippocrates?	**Protecting private information concerns a patient's trust. The oath's exact relationship to Hippocrates is uncertain.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A potter visits a physician after coughing for three days. The physician notes when the cough worsens and asks whether dust fills the workshop. Rather than blame a god, the physician considers whether dusty air might affect the potter's breathing. The physician keeps the patient's concerns private and recommends rest while continuing to observe the cough. Without modern tests, the physician cannot confirm its cause.

Accept other supported examples of observation, investigation of natural or environmental causes, and responsible care. Student cases should treat a proposed cause as a possibility, not a confirmed diagnosis.