



What is Medical History

John C. Burnham

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The field of the history of medicine and health has expanded spectacularly in recent times. In *What is Medical History?* John C. Burnham explores the reasons for this expansion, introducing medical history for those who know little of the subject. He sheds light on a field once written entirely by physicians, but which now attracts not only general historians but also policy makers and health care workers of all kinds.

Burnham explains that people are drawn into reading and writing about five often controversial dramas inherent in the stories of:

- healers in all times and places, from conjurers to technical specialists;
- patients from all ages and cultures;
- diseases, from possession by demons, to infections that expand at the rate of an inch every half hour, to subtle environmental poisons;
- discovery and the communication of ideas, great and trivial, flawed and brilliant;
- continuing controversies around ways that health care delivery affected societies - and was shaped by societies and social institutions - through the ages.

Uniting all of these dramas, Burnham shows, was the tension between the forces of medicalization and the forces of demedicalization.

Burnham, a distinguished and versatile historian of medicine and health, offers a colorful introduction to both traditional subjects, such as the evolution of medical instruments, and the latest controversies. In this dynamic field, he contends, the unanswered questions remain as attractive as the scholarship that gives rise to them.

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