NEWSLETTER
FROM YOUR MED+INFO TEAM

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One page medicine information

APRIL 2008

PHARMACY
a long and proud history

BLOODLETTING (PHLEBOTOMY)

Last month we talked briefly about psychotropic medicines and the history of mental illness as a cover note for our review of medicine for mental illness. Little did we know that experts had proposed that anti-depressants were a waste of time and money – counselling and cheap placebos were the way to go.

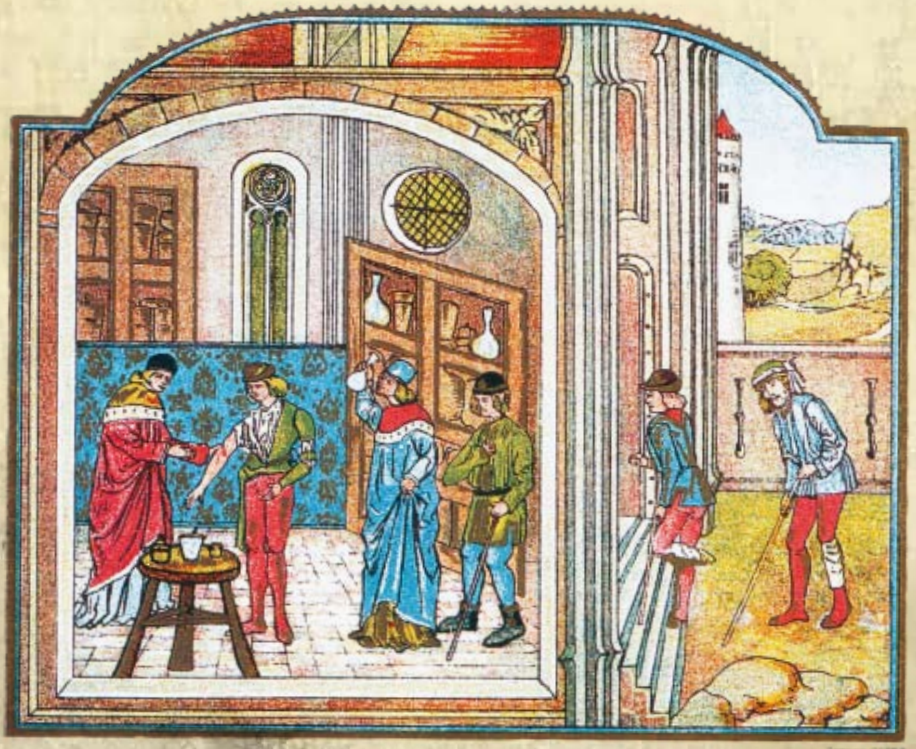
It is a long time since a bit of medical/health news raised such furore: talk back radio, TV coverage, chat groups, the works.

This episode is a painful reminder that there will always be people who believe that the old days were better and for whom plain evidence and common sense is a 'no go' area. We all appreciate that (time permitting) some counselling and listening is of value. But to publicly condemn anti-depressants without any substantial evidence-based data is a gross misuse of the freedom of speech.

Without going on and on I would like to preempt the next possible medical/health news headline: **Chemicals that lower blood pressure are to be replaced by bloodletting!** There is adequate proof that reducing the volume of blood will reduce blood pressure. Pharmacies could reinstate the barber's pole to indicate that they provide a safe and effective bloodletting service that will be far cheaper than beta blockers and diuretics. **The anti-depressant saga** rings alarm bells – we must always be alert to stories that promise wonders yet deliver false hopes. The whole basis of medicine as we know it is solid substantive evidence, hence we refer to it as 'evidence-based medicine'.

Why? It has always amazed me (why did it take so long to disprove this idea?) that until quite recently blood was considered *stagnant* and this was the reasoning behind bloodletting – it got rid of the old, stale blood.

In 1628 **William Harvey** proved that blood *circulates* in the body – it is not stagnant and is not being constantly produced. This was revolutionary news. Harvey developed his theory through **questioning, painstaking observation, cautious reasoning and courage.** His ideas were greeted with a great deal of scepticism at the time. Over 300 years would pass before mankind would benefit from this knowledge and blood pressure would become a core indicator of health.



NATURE'S MEDICINE *Plants That Heal* – National Geographic

In this 16th-century illustration injured people line up to have their blood taken.
Herbal remedies probably filled the jars shown in what was called the "leech's chamber".