Case Study: The Black Death

Priests – ask God

Physicians (Rich)

Barber surgeons (bleeding and minor operations)

Apothecaries- (mixed ingredients using herbs- book e.g. Materia Medical)

Hospitals- (Elderly and travellers – no sick allowed), very small run by church

Women wives and Midwives were the main people to treat illness.

Healers

(White Alligator Photographs Smiling Hippo)

Prevention

Go to church, pray regularly, and do not sin

Eat a healthy diet and exercise well- the Regimen Sanitatis- loose set of instructions provided by Physicians to help people maintain good health.

Hand written copies of leaflets on how to avoid the plague handed out.

Water piped into some cities e.g. Exeter by an aqueduct.

Quarantine imposed on towns

Tried to reduce illness as a result of Miasma by, (remember my Butcher story?!)

Butchers made to clear up their mess

Herbs hung in houses to make them smell nice

Birds kept to allow the air to move

Fires lit to move the air and the smoke to get rid of bad smells

Rakers employed e.g. London by order of the King Edward III in 1349 “remove the filth lying in the streets”

Litter removed – including animal dung

Bells rung to keep the air moving.

Causes

Medieval Medicine

1250-1500

Arrived in 1348 arriving in Melcombe Dorset

Thought to have started in China and spread to India then across Europe.

Nowadays we think it might have been the bubonic plague and we think it was caused by flea or rat bites.

People developed painful swellings called buboes in their armpits and groins- followed by a high fever and headaches then unconsciousness then death.

Over 40% of the population died

It didn’t go away but kept coming back especially in towns for over 300 years.

People thought that God was punishing them (see methods of prevention and treatment)

Treatment

Go to church, pray regularly, do not sin., Pilgrimages, Kings ordered more church services, lit candles as an offering to God, Fasting. Flagellants walked through London in bar feet twice a day whipping themselves to show God they had repented their sins. Activities which offended God stopped (e.g. wrestling in churchyard), presenting an offering of wax- jewels as an offering to God. People wore holy charms.

Apply the theory of opposites- hot have something cold- cucumber, have cool baths (only rich could afford this the poor swam in rivers and lakes).

Bled patients- to rebalance humours (used bleeding charts)

Mix up potions to make people sick (purging) as well as ointments for wounds

Religion- Belief that God controlled everything in the natural world therefore all illness was a punishment or method of testing someone’s faith

Theory of the Four Humours-(Rational) imbalance of the four humours causes illness - (Four humours are- Black Bile, Yellow Bile, Blood, Phlegm- each associated with a season, and hot and dry or cold and wet)- this imbalance comes from God- so religious treatments also apply.

Miasma Theory- belief that bad smells caused illness (this of course was caused by God).

Astrology- the belief that the alignment of the planets causes illness – creates bad air, imbalance of the four humours (God controls the planets)-