CHAPTER SEVEN

SLAVE DOCTORS, SURGEONS AND POPULAR HEALERS

From the time the slaves were purchased in Cartagena to the time they were sold in Lima and other parts of Peru, the slave traders tried to maximise their profits by minimizing mortality and restoring sick slaves to health. They did this by providing sick slaves with special diets and through employing doctors and others to treat the sick. That said, in Cartagena the expenditure on medical care, which included the costs of doctors, medical equipment and medicines, accounted for only about 4 to 6 percent of total expenditure. This excluded food purchased specifically for sick slaves, which might add another one to two percent to the cost (Table 7.1). However, costs could rise with an outbreak of dysentery or smallpox and expenditure on medical care in Lima was consistently higher, since weaker, less healthy slaves appear to have been the last to be sold.

Between 40 to 60 percent of expenditure on medical care went on the services provided by doctors and other medical practitioners. These came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and medical traditions, and hence employed different methods of curing. First, there were the licensed physicians, surgeons and others who had received some formal training and had passed the requisite examinations. However, they were vastly unnumbered by unlicensed practitioners ranging from those who had acquired their knowledge through practice, often by working along side licensed doctors, to popular healers and curanderos, many of whom were of African descent. Finally, due to the Christian obligation to care for the sick, priests and nuns also provided nursing care and most monasteries had infirmaries and pharmacies.1 Medical care on board ship was more limited. Slave traders generally loaded the ship with boxes of medicines and contracted a barber-surgeon to accompany the slaves on the journey to

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probably most of them were unlicensed. During their transshipment from Cartagena to Lima the slaves came into contact with all these types of practitioners who came from a range of medical traditions in Spain, the Americas and Africa.

**Licensed Physicians and Surgeons in Spain and Spanish America**

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Spain controlled the practice of medicine more than any other European country. This control was exercised through the establishment of chairs in universities for teaching medicine and by the regulation of medical practice through

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2 AGNL Real Audiencia Causas Civiles leg. 45 cuad. 171 Año 1618 Autos seguidos por Don Pedro Gómez de Mora, barbero, contra Don Francisco Guisado y otros, por cantidad de pesos por la curación de unos esclavos.