On 11 February 1338, Aires Vicente was licensed to practice surgery by the chief-examiner Master Afonso, Master Domingos, “expert in the art of coughs,” and apothecary-surgeons Master Gil and Master Pero. A few days later on 22 February, Master Domingos was himself licensed in surgery by chief-examiners Master Afonso and Master Gonçalo. This more detailed document explained that King Afonso IV (1325–57) mandated such examinations in order: “to remove harm from the people of my lands, seeing and considering how many make themselves physicians, and masters, surgeons and apothecaries practise these offices in my lands without having the knowledge or the skill to practise them.” Medical historians traditionally viewed such medical licenses as indicators of progress. They were methods of establishing orthodoxy based on knowledge and skill, embodying a keen sense of the “public good.” The unlicensed were thus unorthodox in their practice and potentially harmful charlatans. Recently, historians have developed a more nuanced view, with early-modernists especially putting forward the idea that charlatanism resulted more from competition amongst practitioners than from systems of licensing instituted to protect the sick. Where such systems existed they could reflect increasing state control for financial or political reasons as much

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3 Marques, Chancelarias, pp. 171–2.

as altruism. This essay offers an analysis of one licensing system: that of the expanding late-medieval state of Portugal, and argues that medical licenses were never straightforward regulators of behavior.

The documents referred to at the beginning of this essay are the earliest medical licenses to survive from Portugal. What survives for us to read are the royal chancery copies; the original charters presumably given to the licensee are no longer extant. There is nothing to suggest that licensing was a new innovation in the late 1330s, so it is plausible that it stemmed from a dynamic period of legislation carried during the reign of King Dinis (1279–1325). This chronology would be in keeping with that established by Michael McVaugh and others for the Crown of Aragon where licensing developed in Catalonia and Valencia after 1329, based in Catalonia on legislation going back to 1289. Unfortunately, in Portugal, most of the royal chancery records were re-edited in the fifteenth century, jettisoning much of interest to a medical historian. Just six licensing letters survive from the reign of Afonso IV in the 1330s. It is only from the 1430s that a continuous series survives (three hundred letters through until 1495), but they are also incomplete due to lost or damaged volumes. The only scholar to study these letters in detail, Iria Gonçalves, assumed without question that these letters represented all available practitioners throughout the


9 The sole study and first edition of these letters was Pedro de Azevedo, “Físicos e cirurgiões do tempo de D. Afonso IV,” *Arquivos de História da Medicina Portuguesa*, n.s. 3 (1912): 3–11.