

# Medicine in Practice: Knowledge, Diagnosis and Therapy

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## Introduction

Not just in the writings of physicians but in the real world also, pathologies always conformed to the foremost and generally accepted system... At the time of the Stahlians haemorrhoids were everywhere; when the theory of gastric and bilious conditions prevailed, gastric and bilious illnesses were ubiquitous; as soon as neuropathology gained the upper hand and people had reached a greater degree of luxury there was nothing but nervous disease and ailments arising from weakness; and thus parasites, concealed venereal diseases and many others came to play their part, depending on the prevailing theory of any given time.<sup>1</sup>

In this historical outline of the late eighteenth century the Erfurt medical professor August Friedrich Hecker (1763–1811) claims that new medical theories directly affect medical practice. The extent to which theoretical innovations found immediate expression in diagnosis and therapy is one of the main questions of this chapter, which aims at reconstructing the diagnostic and therapeutic practices and their relative significance. These practices will therefore be juxtaposed with the understanding of body and illnesses held by the academically trained physicians, non-academic practitioners and patients at particular periods of time. A diachronic comparison of the long-term development, changes and continuity in history across eight medical practices will form the centre of this investigation. The practices are those of Johannes Magirus (seventeenth century), Johann Christoph Götz (early eighteenth century), Johann Friedrich Glaser

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1 August F. Hecker, *Des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts Geschichte der Erfindungen, Theorien und Systeme in der Natur- und Arzneywissenschaft* (Gotha 1799), xxxv.

(eighteenth century), César Adolph Bloesch (first half of the nineteenth century), Gottfried Wachter (non-academic healer, first half of the nineteenth century), Franz Ottenthal (nineteenth century), Friedrich von Bönninghausen (homeopath, late nineteenth century) and the polyclinics at the universities of Würzburg and Göttingen, which, in the first half of the nineteenth century, were under the direction of Conrad Heinrich Fuchs.

We will first show what kind of medical knowledge formed the foundation of the medical approaches implemented in the eight practices under investigation, what kind of knowledge can be directly identified from the practice records and whether these bodies of knowledge were in any way class-specific. It is not only the physicians' own knowledge we were interested in, however. We also investigated the extent to which the physicians' descriptions divulge the knowledge and ideas of medical 'lay-persons'<sup>2</sup> such as the patients and the people around them. This question contributes to the research into the histories of medicine, gender and the human body all of which describe and examine 'knowledge' from a theoretical point of view. The last decade has seen increased discussion regarding the convergence or divergence,<sup>3</sup> the coexistence,<sup>4</sup> competition, conflict and marginalization or appropriation of various forms of knowledge<sup>5</sup> or of knowledge transfer.<sup>6</sup> As the early modern philosophical discourse illustrates, 'knowledge' can be defined in a variety of

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- 2 The term 'lay-persons' will be used to distinguish patients from professional practitioners. Use of the term will imply no judgement on the validity of the medical knowledge of such persons.
  - 3 Cf. Michael Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness and the Sick Body in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke 2011), 79–81, 284–85; Marion Maria Ruisinger, *Patientenwege. Die Konsiliarkorrespondenz Lorenz Heisters (1683–1758) in der Trew-Sammlung Erlangen* (Stuttgart 2008), 142–43, 208; Michael Stolberg, *Die Harnschau. Eine Kultur- und Alltagsgeschichte* (Köln 2009), 26–38.
  - 4 Cf. Johanna Geyer-Kordesch, *Pietismus, Medizin und Aufklärung in Preußen im 18. Jahrhundert. Das Leben und Werk Georg Ernst Stahls* (Tübingen 2000); Londa Schiebinger, 'Women of Natural Knowledge', in Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (eds), *The Cambridge History of Science, vol. 3. Early Modern Science* (Cambridge 2006), 192–205.
  - 5 Cf. Barbara Duden, *Geschichte des Ungeborenen. Zur Erfahrungs- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Schwangerschaft, 17.–20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2002); Wulf Oesterreicher, Gerhard Regn and Winfried Schulze (eds), *Autorität der Form, Autorisierung, institutionelle Autorität* (Münster 2003); Monika Mommertz, 'Das Wissen "auslocken". Eine Skizze zur Geschichte der epistemologischen Produktivität von Grenzüberschreitung, Transfer und Grenzziehung zwischen Universität und Gesellschaft', in Yuka Nakamura, Christine Böckelmann and Daniel Tröhler (eds), *Theorie versus Praxis? Perspektiven auf ein Missverständnis* (Zürich 2006), 19–51; Matthias Blanarsch, 'Die Arzt-Patienten-Beziehung zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts, untersucht anhand Johann Storchs Kasuistik zu Molenschwangerschaften', *Medizin, Gesellschaft und Geschichte* 28 (2009), 121–52.
  - 6 Cf. Johann A. Steiger, Sandra Richter and Marc Föcking (eds), *Innovation durch Wissenstransfer in der Frühen Neuzeit. Kultur- und geistesgeschichtliche Studien zu Austauschprozessen in Mitteleuropa* (Amsterdam 2010).