

Losing and gaining control: the role of shame in the ancient medical encounter

1. Patients are at high risk for experiencing shame and humiliation in any medical encounter. This is because they commonly perceive diseases as defects, inadequacies, or shortcomings; while the visit to the hospital and the doctor's office requires physical and psychological exposure. **Patients** respond to the suffering of shame and humiliation by avoiding the physician, withholding information, complaining, and suing. **Physicians** may also experience shame and humiliation in medical encounters resulting in their counter humiliation of patients and dissatisfaction with medical practice. A heightened awareness of these issues can help physicians diminish the shame experience in their patients and in themselves.

Lazare, A. 1987. "Shame and humiliation in the medical encounter." *Archives of Internal Medicine* 147: 1653-1658.

2. Hp. *Breaths* 1.1.-3

There are some arts which to those that possess them are painful (ἐπίπονοι), but to those that use them are helpful (ὀνήσιτοι), a common good to laymen, but to those that practise them **grievous** (λυπηραί). Of such arts there is one which the Greeks call medicine. **For the medical man sees terrible sights (δεινά), touches unpleasant things (θιγγάνει τε ἀηδέων),** and the misfortunes of others bring a harvest of sorrows that are peculiarly his; but the sick by means of the art rid themselves of the worst of evils, disease, suffering, pain and death.

3. Galen, *Commentary on Hp. Epidemics* 6 (17b.280K)

Perhaps some patient, even if unwillingly, would stand to taste the dirt in his ear; but it would be **disgusting** (βδελυρόν) to direct this kind of advice to the doctor.

4. Hp. *On the Sacred Disease* 15

Ὅσοι δὲ ἤδη ἐθάδες εἰσὶ τῇ νόσῳ, προγινώσκουσιν ὅταν μέλλωσι λήψεσθαι, καὶ φεύγουσιν ἐκ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἢν μὲν ἐγγύς ἢ αὐτῷ τὰ οἰκία, οἴκαδε, ἢν δὲ μή, ἐς τὸ ἐρημότατον, ὅπη μέλλουσιν αὐτὸν ἐλάχιστοι ὄψεσθαι πεσόντα, εὐθύς τε **ἐγκαλύπτεται**. τοῦτο δὲ ποιεῖ **ὑπ' αἰσχύνης τοῦ πάθους** καὶ οὐχ ὑπὸ φόβου, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσι, τοῦ δαιμονίου. **τὰ δὲ παιδάρια** τὸ μὲν πρῶτον πίπτουσιν ὅπη ἂν τύχωσιν ὑπὸ ἀηθίης· ὅταν δὲ πολλακίς κατάληπτοι γένωνται, ἐπειδὴν προαίσθωνται, φεύγουσι παρὰ τὰς μητέρας ἢ παρὰ ἄλλον ὄντινα μάλιστα γινώσκουσιν, **ὑπὸ δέους καὶ φόβου** τῆς πάθης· **τὸ γὰρ αἰσχύνεσθαι οὐπω γινώσκουσιν.**

Such as are habituated to their disease have a presentiment when an attack is imminent, and run away from men, home, if their house be near, if not, to the most deserted spot, where the fewest people will see the fall, and immediately **hide their heads**. This is the result of **shame at their malady**, and not, as the many hold, of fear of the divine. **Young children** at first fall anywhere, because they are unfamiliar with the disease; but when they have suffered several attacks, on having the presentiment they run to their mothers or to somebody they know very well, **through fear and terror** at what they are suffering, **since they do not yet know what shame is.**

5. Hp. *Epidemics* 1.11

ἡ τέχνη διὰ τριῶν, τὸ νόσημα καὶ ὁ νοσέων καὶ ὁ ἰητρός· ὁ ἰητρός ὑπηρέτης τῆς τέχνης· **ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι τῷ νοσήματι τὸν νοσέοντα μετὰ τοῦ ἰητροῦ.**

The art has three factors, the disease, the patient, the physician. The physician is the servant of the art. **The patient must co-operate with the physician in combating the disease.**

A] SHAME, VERBAL COMMUNICATION, AND THE FEMALE PATIENT

1. Herodotus 3.133

Not long after this, Atossa, Cyrus' daughter and Darius's wife, found a swelling growing on her breast, which broke and spread further. As long as it was but a small matter, **she said nothing of it but hid it for shame** (ἡ δὲ κρύπτουσα καὶ αἰσχυνομένη ἔφραζε οὐδενί); but presently growing worse, she sent for Democedes and showed it to him.

2. Hp. *Diseases of Women* 1.62

All these (sc. conditions) are more likely to occur in women who have not borne children, although they also happen in those who have. They are, as has been indicated, dangerous and in most cases acute, serious, and difficult to recognize, since they are occurring in women **who sometimes only grasp themselves what their disease is when they have become familiar with the disorders that arise from menstruation, and are older**: by then, both the necessary sequence of events and time itself have taught them the cause of these diseases. Sometimes in women who do not know the source of their illness, diseases have become incurable before the physician learned correctly from a patient the origin of her disease. **Besides, women may be ashamed to speak out** (αἰδέονται φράζειν), **even if they know, since the matter seems shameful to them, due to their inexperience and ignorance** (καὶ σφιν δοκέουσιν αἰσχυρὸν εἶναι ὑπὸ ἀπειρίας καὶ ἀνεπισημοσύνης). Furthermore, **physicians too may err in not inquiring carefully about a disease's cause, and in treating them like diseases in men** (ἀμαρτάνουσιν, οὐκ ἀτρεκέως πυνθανόμενοι τὴν πρόφασιν τῆς νόσου, ἀλλ' ὡς τὰ ἀνδρικὰ νοσήματα ἰώμενοι): indeed, I have seen many women perish in such cases. Rather you must **question** a patient immediately and in detail about the cause; **for there is a great difference in the treatment of women's diseases and those of men** (ἀλλὰ χρὴ ἀνερωτᾶν αὐτίκα ἀτρεκέως τὸ αἴτιον· διαφέρει γὰρ ἡ ἴησις πολλὸν τῶν γυναικείων νοσημάτων καὶ τῶν ἀνδρείων).

⇒ cf. cases of female patients in *Epidemics*, who display ἀφωνία as a symptom:

3.1 (case 6) σιγῶσα, οὐδὲν διελέγετο, [...] ἀπέθανε ἐβδόμη, 3.17 (case 14) σιγῶσα δὲ καὶ σκυθρωπή καὶ οὐ πειθόμενη, [...] ἑξκαιδεκάτη ἄφωνος· ἑπτακαιδεκάτη ἀπέθανε, 3.17 (case 15) περιεστέλλετο καὶ διὰ τέλους αἰεὶ σιγῶσα [...] ἄφωνος, βραχύπνοος. εἰκοστῇ πρώτῃ ἀπέθανε.

⇒ and covering up as a pathological symptom: *Epid.* 2.22 παρεφέρετο, περιεστέλλετο, 7.25 ξυνεκαλύπτετο πρόσωπον, 7.11 καὶ ἡσυχίην ἔσχεν ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ξυγκεκαλύφθαι τε καὶ κευματίσθαι. Cf. Aretaeus *De Causis et Signis Acut. Morb.* 2.12 on satyriasis and sense of shame.

3. Galen, *Commentary on Hp. De officina medici* 1.13, 18B.687–88K.

ἐν ἄλλοις δὲ διὰ τὴν αἰδῶ τοῦ κάμνοντος, ἐπειδὴ περὶ πολλοῦ ποιῆται μὴ βλέπεσθαι τοῖς πολλοῖς ἢν ἔχει διάθεσιν ἢτοι κατὰ ἔδραν ἢ ἐν τοῖς αἰδοίοις. ταῦτα γὰρ ἐστὶν ἃ βούλονται οἱ πάσχοντες λανθάνειν. ἐν εἶδει δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ κατὰ τὰς πυγὰς καὶ τὸ στήθος, τισὶ δε καὶ κατὰ τὴν γαστέρα καὶ πολὺ δὴ μᾶλλον ἔτι κατὰ τὸ καλούμενον ἐφήβιον. ἐγκαλῶν δε τις ἐνταῦθα αὐτὸν Ἴπποκράτην γελοίως αὐτὸν ἔφη τοῦτο γεγραφέναι. τοῖς γὰρ αἰρουμένοις μὴ ὀφθῆναι τὰ τοιαῦτα μόρια χειριζόμενα, πάρεστιν ἐκβαλλόμενον τοῦ οἴκου τοὺς ἐνδον ὄντας ἅπαντας ἐπιστρέψαι μόνον τῷ ἰατρῷ τὸ ἔργον ἢ καὶ τινος ἐνὸς ἢ δυσὶν τῶν οἰκειοτάτων παρόντων. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα λέγων οὐ πεπεύραται πολλῶν αἰδουμένων, ὥσπερ ὀφθῆναι τοῖς παρούσι τὰς διαθέσεις αὐτῶν, οὕτω καὶ κωλύσαι τῆς θεᾶς ἐνίους καὶ χωρίζεσθαι σκευάσαι. πολλάκις δὲ κᾶν κελεύωσι χωρίζεσθαι τινὰς

φιλονεικοῦντες ἢ περιεργαζόμενοι καὶ πολυπραγμονοῦντες ἐπίστασθαι τὰ τοῦ κάμνοντος ἔνιοι τῶν οἰκείων ἢ φίλων ἀναιδῶς παραμένουσιν.

B] DISTRUST OF FEMALE PATIENTS

1. Hp. *Epidemics* 4.6

At the summer solstice, Achelous' wife aborted on the sixth day, with vomiting and shivering. There were sweats, crisis on the fourteenth day. How many months pregnant I do not know. She said that (she had lost) another, a male, towards the twentieth day. **I do not know whether that was true.**

2. Hp. *Diseases of Women* 2.24

The lower belly rises up, and **inexperienced women believe they are pregnant**, because they are experiencing the kind of things pregnant women do until their seventh or eighth month: the cavity increases gradually as time passes, the chest rises, and milk seems to be being formed. When this time is reached, the breasts dry out and decrease in size, and the belly does the same. Any milk vanishes, and the belly—when the time is reached when it should give birth—is undermined and collapses. As these events occur, the uterus closes forcefully in a short time, and its mouth cannot be made out because it is completely drawn together and dried up.

C] SELF-EXAMINATION AND SELF-TREATMENT

1. Hp. *Diseases of Women*

1.59 From these (sc. signs) you will recognize that the woman has dropsy; the same is also indicated by the mouth of the uterus, **for when she touches it, it seems to be dried up** (ψαυούση γὰρ ἰσχνὸν φαίνεται).

2.37 When the case is such, foment with aged urine; then have the patient mix honey and vinegar together with lentil soup as an emetic; then have her bathe in hot water. Next she should pour white Egyptian oil into a pan made of silver or bronze along with salt, and covering herself sit down over the pan. If the odor of the oil is present in her mouth, announce that she will give birth and that her uterus is still healthy. But if there is no odor, still take heart, and when she is about to go to bed have her apply the Egyptian oil in a piece of wool as a suppository; on the following day **have her examine herself** (σκεψάσθω) to see whether the mouth of her uterus is straighter. **If she says it is** (καὶ ἦν φῆ εἶναι) foment her with fragrant substances for three days, and apply non irritating suppositories.

2.48 Then have her insert emollient suppositories for three days, and **if on palpating herself** (ἦν ψαυούση αὐτῆ) she thinks that the mouth of her uterus is soft, plug it with a pessary of raw flax like the one used for internal suppurations.

2.24 πυριωμένη δέ, ἦν δύνηται σκέψασθαι, κελεύειν ψαῦσαι τοῦ στόματος.

After the patient has been fomented, **if she is able to examine herself, ask her to palpate the orifice of her uterus.**

2. Hp. *Diseases of Women* 1.40

Phrontis: this patient suffered all the things women do who are not cleaned of their lochia, as well as having pain in her genitalia; **she discovered by examining herself that she was obstructed and reported this**, (καὶ ψηλαφῶσα ἔγνω ὅτι οἱ συνεπέφρακτο, καὶ ἔφρασε) and on being treated she was cleaned, she recovered, and she was fertile. If she had not been treated or her cleaning had

not broken out spontaneously, her ulcer would have become larger and brought her into the danger of her ulcers becoming cancerous, if left untreated.

3. Galen, *On Prognosis* 8

Boethus' wife suffered from the so-called female flux. She was **ashamed** (αίδουμένη) first to tell this to the top doctors, of whom I was universally acknowledged to be one, but put herself in the use of her usual midwives who were the best in Rome. When no improvement took place, Boethus called us all together and asked us what to do. When it was agreed to act entirely according to the treatment prescribed by Hippocrates and the best of his medical successors, he decided to introduce me often to her attendants and asked me to examine the composition of individual remedies [...]

4. Euripides, *Hippolytus* 293-9

If your malady is one of those that are **unmentionable** (καί μὲν νοσεῖς τι τῶν ἀπορρήτων κακῶν) here are women to help set it to rights. **If your misfortune may be spoken of to men, speak so that the thing may be revealed to doctors.** Well, why are you **silent**? You ought not to be mute, child, but should either refute me if I have said something amiss or comply with the good advice I have given.

Cf. the wife of Justus (Galen, *On Prognosis* 6)

D] DOCTOR-FOCUSED APPROACH

1. Hp. *On Decorum*

12. On entering bear in mind your manner of sitting, reserve, arrangement of dress, decisive utterance, brevity of speech, composure (ἀταρακτοποίησις), bedside manners, care, replies to objections, calm self-control (εὐσταθείης τῆς ἐν ἑωυτῷ) to meet the troubles that occur, rebuke of disturbance, readiness to do what has to be done.

14. Keep a watch also on the faults of the patients, which often make them **lie** (διεψεύσαντο) about the taking of things prescribed. For through not taking disagreeable drinks, purgative or other, they sometimes die. What they have done never results in a confession, but **the blame is thrown upon the physician** (καὶ αὐτῶν μὲν οὐ πρὸς ὁμολογίην τρέπεται τὸ ποιηθέν, τῷ δὲ ἰητρῷ τὴν αἰτίην προσήψαν).

16. Perform all this calmly and adroitly, **concealing most things from the patient** (τὰ πολλὰ τὸν νοσέοντα ὑποκρυπτόμενον) while you are attending to him. Give necessary orders with cheerfulness and serenity, **turning his attention away from what is being done to him** (σφέτερα δὲ ἀποτρεπόμενον); sometimes reprove sharply and emphatically, and sometimes comfort with solicitude and attention, revealing nothing of the patient's future or present-condition.

17. Let there never be any doubt about the points which will secure the success of your plan, and **no blame will attach to you, but achievement will bring you pride** (καὶ οὐ σοὶ τὸν ψόγον περιάψει, τευχθὲν δὲ πρὸς τὸ γάνος ἔσται).

18. Such are the things that make for good reputation (εὐδοξίην) and decorum (εὐσχημοσύνην), in wisdom, in medicine, and in the arts generally.

2. Hp. *Epidemics*, 6.5.7

If the ear aches, wrap wool around your fingers, pour on warm oil, then put the wool in the palm of the hand and put it over the ear so that something will seem to him to come out. Then throw it in the fire. **A deception** (ἀπάτη).

E] AESTHETICS, PRAGMATISM, AND THE PATIENT'S DIGNITY

1. Hp. *Fractures* 19

When the thigh-bone is broken [...] nothing should be omitted in order that the parts may be properly distended and put in a straight line; **for it is a great disgrace and an injury (μεγάλη γὰρ ἡ αἰσχύνη καὶ βλάβη)** to exhibit a shortened thigh. For the arm, when shortened, might be concealed, and the mistake would not be great; but a shortened thigh-bone would exhibit the man maimed. For when the sound limb is placed beside it, being longer than the other, **it exposes the mistake (ἐλέγχει)**, and therefore it would be to the advantage of a person who would be **improperly treated (κακῶς ἰητρεύεσθαι)** that both his legs should be broken, rather than either of them; for in this case the one would be of the same length as the other.

2. Hp. *On Joints* 35

If the nose is broken, which happens in more than one way, those who delight in fine bandaging without judgment **do more damage (λωβέονται)** than usual [...] Now, as I said, those who devote themselves to a **foolish parade of manual skill (οἱ τὴν ἀνόητον εὐχειρίην ἐπιτηδεύοντες ἄσμενοι)** are especially delighted to find a fractured nose to bandage. The result is that the practitioner rejoices, and **the patient is pleased** for one or two days; afterwards the patient soon has enough of it, for the burden is tiresome; and as for the practitioner, he is satisfied with showing that he knows how to apply complicated nasal bandages. But such bandaging acts in every way contrary to what is proper; for first, in cases where the nose is rendered concave by the fracture, if more pressure is applied from above, it will obviously be more concave, and again in cases where the nose is distorted to either side, whether in the cartilaginous part or higher up, **bandaging will obviously be useless in either case, and will rather do harm (δηλονότι οὐδὲν αὐτοῦς ἢ ἄνωθεν ἐπίδεσις ὠφελήσειεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ βλάψει μᾶλλον).**

F] ILLNESS AND PRIDE: EPIDAUURIAN *IAMATA* AND VOTIVE BODY PARTS

[A1]

Kleo was pregnant for five years. After the fifth year of pregnancy, she came as a suppliant to the god and slept in the Abaton. As soon as she had left it and was outside the sacred area, she gave birth to a son who, as soon as he was born, washed himself at the fountain and walked about with his mother. After this success, she inscribed upon an offering: 'The wonder is not the size of the plaque, but the act of the god: Kleon bore a burden in her stomach for five years, until she slept here, and he made her well'.

