



With Words and Knives: Learning Medical Dispassion in Early Modern England (The History of Medicine in Context)

Lynda Payne

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The practice of medicine in the days before the development of anaesthetics could often be a brutal and painful experience. Many procedures, especially those involving surgery, must have proved almost as distressing to the doctor as to the patient. Yet in order to cure, the medical practitioner was often required to inflict pain and the patient to endure it. Some level of detachment has always been required of the doctor and especially, of the surgeon. It is the construction of this detachment, or dispassion, in early modern England, with which this work is concerned. The book explores the idea of medical dispassion and shows how practitioners developed the intellectual, verbal and manual skill of being able to replace passion with equanimity and distance. As the skill of 'dispassion' became more widespread it was both enthusiastically promoted and vehemently attacked by scientific and literary writers throughout the early modern period. To explain why the practice was so controversial and aroused such furor, this study takes into account not only patterns of medical education and clinical practice but wider debates concerning social, philosophical and religious ideas.

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