History Knowledge Organiser: Prehistoric and the Ancient World

Prehistoric medicine:

- As most prehistoric people were nomadic, there were no governments and no public health systems. They were hunter-gatherers. They had little time to consider how their bodies worked.
- People would live in small groups and would move on to a new location before waste could build up and become dangerous.
- The nomadic lifestyle would have encouraged physical fitness and although in some areas starvation would have been a problem, in some areas people may have had a good diet.
- It is possible that prehistoric people would have developed a basic knowledge of herbal remedies which they could pass down generations.
- There is evidence that prehistoric people performed some successful operations: skulls have been found with evidence of trephinations (the removal of a section of skull) and bone growth. This suggests that the patient survived for some time after the surgery.

Ancient Egypt

- Ancient Egyptians did not have sewers, public baths or piped water.
- The majority of Egyptians had toilets in their homes, although these were not connected to any sewers.
- Despite the lack of public health facilities, they placed huge religious importance on cleanliness and appearance: most ancient Egyptians wore eye makeup which protected their eyes and many slept under mosquito nets.
- Priests in particular focused on keeping themselves and their religious instruments clean.
- Ancient Egyptians had no anaesthetics and only had access to herbal anti-septics, such as binding wounds with willow leaves. As a result, they did not conduct internal or invasive surgery
- The Ancient Egyptians mummified their dead. The process of embalming meant that they gained knowledge about the different internal organs. However, a lot of this knowledge was inaccurate. For example, they thought the brain was only a mechanism for cooling the body.
- Egyptian doctors believed that the gods and spirits caused disease by disturbing the normal operation of the body. As a result, natural and supernatural cures were used. Often a charm would be used to make a natural remedy stronger.
- The Ancient Egyptians watched the Nile and believed the body worked in the same way: channels leading from the heart which could be blocked. They believed people could be cured by "unblocking channels" in the body through purging or bleeding. This is similar to the four humours.

Key Terms	Definitions
Nomadic	Moving from place to place rather than settling.
Trephination	'Drilling' into the skull of someone to release the spirits that are making them ill.
Hieroglyphics	A form of writing introduced in Ancient Egypt. A series of 'symbols' that form the written word.

Ancient Greece:

- There was little government involvement in public health: there were was no running water and there were no sewers.
- **Hippocrates** accepted that most Greeks would be too poor or too busy to follow a programme of health and so would be less healthy.
- In early Greece, free Asclepions were the focus of healing. These were temples but also acted as health spas and gyms. Despite the emphasis on eating well, resting and bathing, whether you were cured or not was attributed to Asclepius, the god of healing.
- Hippocratic medicine focused on observation and diagnosis. This consisted on balancing the four humours of the patient by:
  - Heating or cooling the patient
  - Treating a fever by keeping the patient cool and dry.
  - Bleeding or purging the patient.
- Unusually, dissection was allowed in Alexandria. Most Greek doctors had to dissect animals such as pigs. This caused inaccuracies. As this city was in Egypt, the Greeks could also gain knowledge about anatomy from the Egyptians and from their practise of mummification.

Ancient Rome:

- The Romans had the first ever centrally organised public health system..
- The Romans initially built hospitals to tend to their soldiers. These later became valeudinaria, which were free hospitals for the public. However, these hospitals focused on first aid and good living.
- There were various theories about the different causes of disease: for example; Galen followed Hippocrates and believed disease was caused by an imbalance of the four humours.
- Many Romans still believed that diseases were punishments from the gods.
- Herbal and other practical cures were popular. The Romans had no anaesthetics and only had access to herbal anti-septics. As a result, they did not conduct invasive surgery.
- However, working with gladiators and the roman army meant that doctors had a lot of experience with first aid and external surgery, such as removing skin tags and draining swellings.
- **Galen** – A Greek doctor who moved to Rome and made the concept of the four humours popular. His ideas were followed well into the Renaissance.