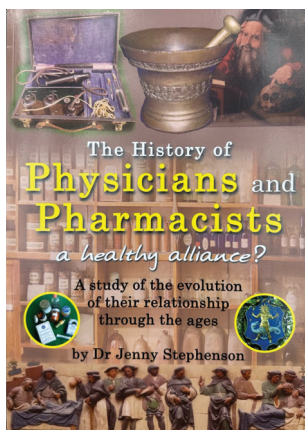


The History of Physicians and Pharmacists: A Health Alliance? A Study of the Evolution of their Relationship through the Ages

By Jenny Stephenson
Sheffield: Privately printed, 2022. Pp. 180, Softback,
price £12.00. ISBN 978-1-3999-4308-6.



Reviewed by John K. Crellin

A book reviewer faces various challenges. One is deciding whether an author serves the intended readership. While Jenny Stephenson offers no indication, the attractive, illustrated book is clearly intended for lay readers. Even so, the question posed in the title is one for all health professionals.

How does Stephenson approach her question? Rather than offering a clear thread of ‘relationships through the ages’ (quoting the title), the 180 glossy pages of A4 size pages and easy-to-read, amply spaced text, essentially comprise brief vignettes (as ‘chapters’) organised in ten sections and forty-two chapters. Section titles include, ‘The Start of the Story of Healing’, ‘Pivotal Plants’, ‘War on Ethics and Ideas’, ‘War Against the Quacks: Facing out the Fakes’, ‘Pharmacists and Doctors: Community Collaboration’, and the ‘NHS’. Within each section the vignettes tend to be a smorgasbord of rather disjointed topics. For instance, under ‘Learning and Labouring’ (Section 2), the two-page chapter 3 on ‘Merry monks – medicinal of course’ offers only definitions (e.g., for some ‘wines’) plus a short account of Buckfast Tonic Wine where some information is contrary to the references provided.

Another chapter (3-1), titled ‘From Healing Herbs to Plant-Based Medicines’, considers only the doctrine of signatures. Stephenson provides notes on Paracelsus that imply he originated, rather than developed, the idea. She also poses the question: ‘Doctrine of Signatures – Is it true?’ Her response is ‘To some extent, the answer is yes’. Unfortunately, to justify the claim, the accompanying examples of plants need more discussion. Problematic, too, is that the choice of many ‘references’ for the chapter is unclear and many would be better labelled ‘Further Reading’, as is the case in some other chapters.

Given the author is a general medical practitioner, one might anticipate perspicacious insights in Sections 8, 9, 10 with titles closer to the question proposed in the book title. There are a few relevant points such as positive comments on Medicine Use Reviews, on the roles of pharmacies during the Covid pandemic, and the relevance of the ‘symptom iceberg idea’ on the need for accessible advice in community pharmacies. However, a coherent discussion is marred by further disjointed vignettes. For example, one on ‘Famous Pharmacists – *endeavour, enterprise and education*’, covers unevenly three distinct topics – ‘Friedrich Sertürner’, ‘The story of Boots . . .’, and a ‘Sheffield pharmacy, J. Preston Ltd.’ – without relating them clearly to the heading (8-5). No insightful thoughts are offered on current social issues and professional needs. Nevertheless, Stephenson makes clear her hopes there will be a will for ‘collaborative working in the best interests of the patient.’

How likely is it that a lay reader will gain new insights into an alliance between medicine and pharmacy? I feel it is doubtful. As indicated, I find the patchwork of vignettes a substantial problem. Granted readers might find interest in individual chapters, but then questionable statements and debatable points are worrying. Moreover, the illustrations (mostly photographs and art work by the author) are often inadequately labelled, while others, more holiday memories, hardly supplement the text. To close, I must notice the challenges of Internet shopping. An online search for the book (October 14, 2023) offered it for £75.00 <picclick.co.uk>. The book’s list price is £12.00, while it is important to note that proceeds are donated to charity.

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