

A History of Medicine in 50 Discoveries replete with wild and wonderful tales

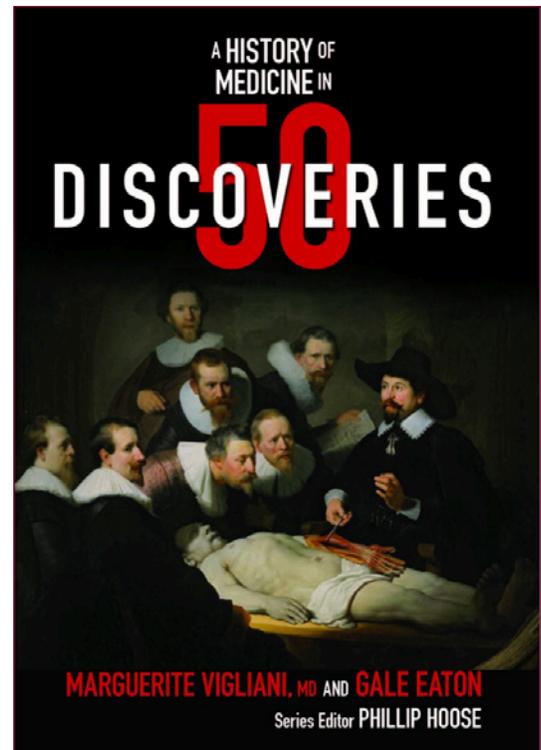
JOSEPH H. FRIEDMAN, MD

MARGUERITE VIGLIANI, MD, Rhode Island obstetrician and gynecologist, and Clinical Professor at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University, has published, with co-author, Gale Eaton, PhD, retired professor of children's literature in the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Library and Information Studies, a book on the history of medicine. In this era of Kindle, e-books and e-magazines, like this one, it is a joy to hold in one's hands a book that not only feels good, with a significant heft to it, but is beautifully designed and illustrated.

It is a history of medicine for middle and high school students, part of a series intended to grab kids' attention by focusing on 50 exciting stories in history, in this case, the history of medicine. Of course there cannot be a consensus on the 50 most important or the 50 most exciting stories, just as there can't be universal agreement on who should win a Nobel prize each year, but these are wonderful stories. I must admit up front that Marguerite is an old friend, who delivered two of my children, so that my review may be a tad short of "objective," but this is Rhode Island, where there are way less than 6 degrees of separation.

Marguerite thought that since I'm a neurologist I'd be most interested in the story on trephining, which traced the history of the practice, seen in skulls of people who had survived for many years after the procedure. But I actually liked best the story about Calmette, an early immunologist who will forever be linked with the BCG inoculation against tuberculosis. He was interested in developing an anti-snake venom treatment and was able, in 1894, to purchase a barrel full of cobras from India. As an ardent believer in the balance between evidence and experience-based medicine I was also taken by the story of al-Razi, a legendary Persian physician in the late 800's, who apparently published early, if not the earliest, controlled clinical trials. One demonstrated that epileptics who received sneeze therapy had fewer seizures than those who did not, and that bleeding reduced symptoms of presumed meningitis, compared to controls who were not bled. So much for evidence-based medicine. We also learn that Leonardo da Vinci lingered by an elderly dying man to perform a dissection as soon as possible. DNA, blood circulation, the discovery of penicillin and 40+ more topics are cleverly discussed, in a straightforward and engaging manner, that encourages the reader to think about the larger issues associated with each of these 50 medical advances.

This will make great summer or holiday reading for middle and high school students who might need a little encouragement to learn more about medicine and its history. ❖



BOOK IN BRIEF

Authors

Marguerite Vigliani, MD
Gale Eaton, Phillip Hoose (editor)

Audience

Teens, Young Adults

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Overview

Exploration of medicine begins in prehistory

From Mesopotamian pharmaceuticals and Ancient Greek sleep therapy through midwifery, amputation, bloodletting, Renaissance anatomy, bubonic plague, and cholera to the discovery of germs, X-rays, DNA-based treatments and modern prosthetics, the history of medicine is a wild ride through the history of humankind.