

History and Development of Dermatology

Dermatology, the science of the skin, was one of the many specialties, which evolved from general internal medicine during the course of the nineteenth century. Till this time, physicians with few exceptions were little concerned with the skin, apart from the exanthematic eruptions of acute fevers. The history of dermatology is characterised by its long-term existence, both ancient and contemporary. Indeed, the medical specialty was born in the modern times, but its practical application is traced back to antiquity. The obvious exteriority of skin diseases is one of the reasons why it drew medical attention early in history. Therapeutics of dermatoses have been known and practised by our ancient physicians for centuries. Charaka Samhita contains one chapter on the subject. In this ancient book, worshipful Atreya Punarvasu, has described eighteen dermatoses. He attributed these dermatoses to the preponderance of morbid humours (vata, pitta, and kepha) causing disturbances of body elements and thereby diseases. [1]

One of the earliest known sources documenting skin ailments is the Ebers Papyrus, a medical document from ancient Egypt dating to around 1500 BC. It describes various skin diseases, including ulcers, rashes, and tumors, and prescribes surgery and ointments to treat the ailments. [2]

In 1572, Geronimo Mercuriali of Forlì, Italy, completed *De morbis cutaneis* (translated "On the diseases of the skin"), and is known as the first scientific work to be dedicated to dermatology. One source lists Jean Astruc (1684-1766) as the founder of modern dermatology. [3] In 1799, Francesco Bianchi wrote the book *Dermatologia* which is the first comprehensive textbook of modern dermatology written for the students of medicine. [4]

In 1801 the first great school of dermatology became a reality at the famous Hôpital Saint-Louis in Paris, while the first textbooks (Willan's, 1798-1808) and atlases (Alibert's, 1806-1814) appeared in print during the same period of time. [5]

During the last decades of 19th century, contributions of some, such as Heberden, Cullen and Hebra, laid the foundations on which the pioneer specialist

dermatologists of the following century were able to build. [6, 7]

Until recently, dermatology remained a purely medical speciality in Indian subcontinent, although our Western counterparts worked exhaustively on its surgical dimensions. [8] The last 20 years or so have witnessed a tremendous growth and dermatologists have adopted various surgical techniques and branch of dermatology like dermato-surgery and cosmetology. Since 20-30% of cases in paediatric practice have dermatological problems, a need was felt to constitute Paediatric Dermatology. [9]

Obviously, institution and research developments were the main drivers in the evolution of modern medical specialties. Beyond the rise of new technologies which continuously involve the creation of different treatments, the changes initiated by dermatology were common with many other medical specialties: having a patient-centered approach, adapting to interdisciplinarity and public health issues, and developing research.

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Dr. Kumar Pokhrel
Associate professor
Department of Dermatology
Nepalgunj Medical College
Email: dr@kumarpokhrel.com.np