



GCSE, Special History Project – Medicine through Time

Learning Objective:

The supporting material in the archive folder looks at Medicine in the 20C, in British colonial territories such as Nigeria, Kenya, and The Falkland Islands. This is supporting material for the 'development through time study' for history GCSE programme.

The Colonial Medical Service was responsible for healthcare in British overseas territories such as East and West Africa, Asia and the Pacific islands. Ordinary men and women applied for these posts, young people who wanted the adventure of working in the overseas territories. The postings were often in remote areas with very little medical equipment or back up. Sometimes local people were trained as theatre staff and nurses and assistants.

The Colonial Medics were young, new qualified doctors and nurses who soon realised that they were the ones in charge, they couldn't just practice the speciality in which they had been trained, they had to react to anything and everything.

There was sometimes conflict between the traditional medicine cultural ideas of a country or district, and Western medicine. Sometimes local people would not be persuaded to use Western medicine, but there was also an exchange of ideas and knowledge between the two cultures.

All medical doctors stationed out in the colonies were responsible for their own departments, and there was a heavy administrative role – submitting reports, inspecting government property, and answering to their Colonial District Officer. According to the British Medical Journal of 1946, bachelors were encouraged to apply to the Colonial Medical Service as it was felt that women would be unable to cope with the climate and the social conditions.

This type of colonial life, and the fulfilling role as a medical officer, or nurse, appealed to many who wanted to travel the wider world, and serve The Empire. Listening to the experiences of these men and women tells us that they had a strong vocation to bring their knowledge and Western medicine to remote societies.

The oral histories and archive images provided tell some of their stories. The piece of film included in the archive folder explores a different era in Colonial Medicine. The film is part of a collection from the St Josephs Missionary Society in London, and shows Fathers and Sisters at work in Uganda in the 1920s. Missionaries in the colonies built schools and hospitals, but they saw their main duty as converting non believers to the Christian faith. (See the notes on St Josephs for more information on this film)

The image, film and oral history archive folder will help support students during their study of the topic, 'Medicine through time'. These are rare images, film and oral histories that can assist students in looking at questions like:

- The importance of medicine in colonial countries, and why was it valued?
- The role of medical professionals who served during the British Empire
- The role of women in the Colonial Medical Service
- The conflict between traditional and Western Medicine
- The process of change in medical thinking during the 19th and 20th Century
- What were the main turning points?
- How (or whether) the process of change was influenced by:
 - individuals
 - the government
 - science and technology
 - war
 - attitudes and beliefs in society
 - trade

The Learning team are happy to support your teaching of this module, as well as to supply any further information and archival material to support students to meet the requirements for this module.

