

PREVISIT GUIDE

During your visit to the Jewish Museum of Maryland, you will spend time looking at and analyzing artifacts related to the topic of health. The exhibit is divided into different sections that present the process of becoming a doctor as well as the places where medicine is practiced. Follow the journey through the library and university to the hospital, pharmacy and laboratory to discover what life was like for Jewish doctors in the twentieth century and how the field of medicine has changed over time.

Important things to remember:

- Practice careful looking
- Read labels to help contextualize artifacts
- Think about the big picture
- Ask questions!

Library

Harry Friedenwald collected historic books, manuscripts and artifacts relating to Jews in medicine. His collection highlights the long history of Jewish involvement in medicine and how Jews have been associated with health and healing since ancient times. Many of the books from the collection date back to the 15th and 16th centuries and are written in different languages: Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German, French, and English. Greek and Latin became the universal languages of medicine in the Renaissance, allowing doctors from different parts of the world to exchange ideas.

Discussion Questions

- How does having a common language help the medical field?
- How do you use Greek and Latin in your daily life?

University

Becoming a doctor takes a lot of work! Medical students must first complete a Bachelor's degree before attending medical school for four years. After receiving their doctorate, medical students must complete a residency and, for more specialized fields, a fellowship, under the watchful eye of more experienced doctors. Many Jews immigrated to the United States from Europe, hoping to achieve the American Dream through the field of medicine. But in the early 20th century they encountered quotas, or limitations, that restricted the number of Jews admitted to medical school as a result of antisemitism. Quotas were not used just to limit the number of Jewish students, but also those of other minorities including women, African Americans, and Catholics.

Discussion Questions

- How are quotas unfair?
- If quotas are used to determine acceptance at medical schools, are the best people becoming doctors? Why or why not?
- What are possible ways to challenge the quota system?

Doctor's Office

Dr. Morris Abramovitz immigrated to the United States from Lithuania when he was 22. He enrolled at Maryland Medical College and then later at John Hopkins University School of Medicine. He established a family practice in Baltimore and was an innovator, like other doctors, during the early twentieth

century, often referred to as the “golden age” of medicine. The rapid pace of scientific discovery that began in the early 20th century launched a “golden age” of medicine. As deadly diseases became curable and medical innovations improved quality of life, physicians rose to unprecedented heights of public admiration.

Discussion Questions

- Do you feel that becoming a doctor is a respectable career today?
- What are some innovations of doctors from the early 20th century that are still in use today? (To answer this question, you might need to conduct some research into the history of antibiotics, vaccines and common medications that are in use today)

Hospital

In response to discrimination against both patients and doctors, religious and ethnic communities in 19th century America established their own hospitals. For Jewish communities, these institutions served as sources of pride: proof of Jewish contribution to American science and society. In this era, women entered the medical profession predominantly as nurses or volunteers.

Discussion Questions

- Do you feel there is still a place for ethnic or religious-specific hospitals? Why or why not?
- Why might a community feel the need to take care for their own members?

Pharmacy

The corner drugstore was a fixture in its neighborhood, and the pharmacist was a trusted source for everyday health advice. Pharmacists saw themselves as community health professionals with a responsibility to educate their clients displaying advertisements in their store windows. Today the pharmacist’s role has expanded to include vaccinations and screening tests. The exhibit also focuses on the work of Garcia de Orta, a Portuguese Jewish doctor who studied plants and their medicinal uses. He wrote *Coloquios dos simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da India* (Conversations on the simples, drugs and materia medica of India), which was published in India in 1563.

Discussion Questions

- Do you know of any plants that have medical purposes?
- How does advertising for medication affect healthcare?

Laboratory

The racial “science” of eugenics gained widespread influence in early 20th century Europe and America—and it was embedded in the Nazis’ racial ideology. Eugenics promoted the idea that certain races and ethnic groups were superior than others and that character and physical traits that were deemed inferior could be eliminated. The claims of eugenics were firmly discredited, and by the 1950s, the study of genetics came to the fore. Today, by examining the genetic code for causes of diseases, it is possible for tests to detect whether or not an individual is a carrier of a specific disease as well as to predict the likelihood of this disease being passed on to children. Certain ethnic and religious groups are statistically more closely linked to specific inherited diseases. Jews, in particular, have responded to recommendations for genetic testing in an effort to prevent specific diseases, such as Tay-Sachs, which are especially prevalent among its members.

Discussion Questions

- Is there a valid purpose for genetic testing? Why or why not?
- Would you consider participating in genetic testing to determine whether or not you had a genetic disease? Why or why not?

Gymnasium

To early 20th century Americans, medicine and health were linked with good citizenship. Adopting American health standards was a way for Jewish immigrants to acclimate to their new home while disproving negative preconceptions many people held about Jews.

Discussion Questions

- What are some healthy choices you make?
- Who do you trust to help you decide if something is healthy or not?
- Can you think of examples of certain activities or foods that were at one time thought to be healthy and are no longer recommended?

Activity

<http://chickensoupexhibit.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CREATE-YOUR-PLATE.pdf>