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Parallels Between The Black Death and COVID-19 Pandemic

PRESENTER:

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BACKGROUND

From 1346 to 1353, a bacteria now known as *Yersinia pestis* caused millions of deaths all over the world, resulting in the time period to often be referred to as “The Black Death.” The Black Death called for the development of medical techniques and patient care, such as bedside manner. With the escalating death tolls and no known cause, medical professionals were left confused and in disarray as to what the best course of treatment was and how to protect themselves from illness. One might be under the impression that bedside manner techniques used today have no relation to the techniques used during the Middle Ages. However, with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, one can see that these techniques have served as the foundation for modern medical treatment and patient care.

METHODS

The main method used was Rosemary Horrox’s translation of primary texts such as *Documents inédits sur la grande peste de 1348* and the confessions in *Strassburg Urkundenbuch*. Articles and research papers of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic were also analyzed, such as “What does COVID Do to Your Blood?”, published through Johns Hopkins Medicine. Additionally, images and reports from both the Black Death and the COVID-19 Pandemic were analyzed. These were the most effective methods as it provides scientific research and personal testimony by patients of both pandemics.

RESULTS

The COVID-19 Pandemic has demonstrated that bedside manner techniques have developed from the Middle Ages and have supported patients who have become ill due to the virus. In an analysis of the techniques used during the Black Death and the COVID-19 Pandemic, this study identified parallels in the methods of patient interaction, courses of treatment, and methods of protection from disease.

Did the Black Death serve as the foundation for how we manage the COVID-19 Pandemic?



Depicted in the image above is a plague doctor wearing personal protective equipment to prevent catching the plague.



Depicted in the image above is a person wearing personal protective equipment to avoid catching COVID-19.



PATIENT INTERACTION & TREATMENT

- Patient interaction was very personal; doctors asked questions in order to collect extensive background knowledge on the patient. This would include diet, age, and excretion (Horrox, 1994).
- Collection of a patient’s excretion was vital to treat the patients. During the Black Death, they would analyze the color of urine, blood, and vomit. During COVID-19, we analyze blood samples as it is shown to increase clotting factors in the lungs of certain patients and urine samples to detect kidney damage (Sperati, 2022).
- At the early stages of COVID-19, physicians asked the same questions to patients in order to narrow down what could cause the symptoms of COVID-19 and prepare a treatment plan.

DISCRIMINATION

- Many believed that the plague was a punishment from God. This increased the instances of Anti-semitism, with people accusing Jewish individuals of poisoning the wells (Horrox, 1994).
- With COVID-19, discrimination of many minority groups increased. When speculations of the COVID-19 Pandemic beginning in Wuhan, China arose, Anti-Asian hate crimes increased exponentially (Yam, 2022). Cases of Anti-semitism also increased; flyers were distributed by a group called the Goyim Defense League stating, “every single aspect of the COVID agenda is Jewish” (Ziri, 2022).

METHODS OF PROTECTION

- In both pandemics, families distanced themselves from their friends and relatives in an effort to prevent the spread of disease. This is what we now call quarantine and social distancing.
- Since quarantining worked to decrease the spread of disease, the second wave of the Black Death was handled more carefully. Without the first wave, we would not have known how effective masks and PPE are in order to tackle later pandemics, such as COVID-19.