

# LMHA Meeting Summary

**Date:** Wednesday January 28, 2015

**Time:** 20:00 - 22:30 p.m.

**Attendees:** Gordon Dickie, Beate Gundert, M. and Vladimir Hachinski, Laurence Jerome, Christine and Vivian McAlister, Shelley McKellar, Seyed Mirsattari, Peter Neary, Paul Potter, Maya Shatzmiller, S. Smith.

**Title of the presentations:** “Life is short, the art is long” Hippocrates then and now.  
Speakers: Drs. Paul Potter (then) and Vladimir Hachinski (now).

Vladimir Hachinski and Paul Potter, the two original founders of LMHA in 1981, presented a talk on the ancient writings attributed to Hippocrates of Cos (460-380 BC) and the role they have played in medicine over the centuries since then.

Potter introduced the collection of approximately seventy treatises transmitted in our medieval Greek manuscripts under Hippocrates' name, and read passages from various of these to illustrate the fundamental principles of the biology and therapy they embody, as well as to give an idea of their organization and manner of exposition. The texts included a description of an outbreak of mumps in Thasos (Epidemics 1, 1), a possible stroke affecting the speech-centre of the brain (Coan Prenotions 353), a method of localizing an empyema in the chest in preparation for thoracentesis (Diseases 3, 16), an explanation of the pathogenesis and treatment of haemorrhoids (Haemorrhoids 1-2), and an explicit statement on the mental functions of the brain (Sacred Disease 17).

Hachinski talked about the continuing relevance of Hippocrates.

1. As a source for modern terminology

With the advent of brain imaging, it came to be recognized that there were numerous white matter changes, particularly in those who were cognitively impaired. A number of authors jumped to the conclusion that this was due to ischemia, however based on research done in London, Ontario, it is obvious that there were multiple causes of white matter changed appearances and a term was necessary to indicate a commonality, in other words, a word that represents the fact that the areas that showed up on the brain imaging were less dense than the rest of the brain. With the help of Paul Potter and Harold Merskey the author coined the term “leukoaraiosis”. Based on the Greek root “leukos” and “araiosis” which means less dense, which Hippocrates used in reference to the lung being less dense than other organs.

2. The Brain as the Self

“from the brain and from the brain only, arise our pleasures, joys, laughter and jests as well as our sorrows, pains, griefs and tears. Through it.....we think, see, hear, and distinguish the ugly from the beautiful, the bad from the good”. This remains the most

succinct and eloquent premise of neuroscience. This quote was used by the author for a doctor honoris causa acceptance speech at the University of Salamanca (Spain) advocating the joining of the sciences and the humanities through an understanding of the brain (Neurognosis)

3. A holistic approach to prevention

“The function of protecting and developing health must rank even above that of restoring it when it is impaired” Hippocrates

Environment

Hippocratic writings on “Air, water and places” has gained new relevance as we change the environment.

For example, Air

Each increase of 10 µg per cubic meter in the level of fine particle pollution exposure leads to

24% increase in the risk of cardiovascular events

76% increase in death risk from cardiovascular events

(Miller et al. NEJM 2007 Feb 1;356(5):447-58)

5% increase in stroke mortality observed within 200 m of a main road due to exposure to road traffic pollution

(Maheswaran et al. Stroke 2003 Dec;34(12):2776-80)

A Balanced Life

Diet/Exercise

“But the discovery I have made is how to recognize what the overpowering element in the body is: whether exercise is overpowering food, or food is overpowering exercise, and how one must remedy each thing completely and ensure health, so as to prevent the approach of disease, unless a person makes very great and frequent mistakes, in which case medications will be required, and sometimes not even these will be able to work a cure.” (Diet 3;67)

Plato, probably inspired by Hippocratic writing, stated...”to require the help of medicine, nor when a wound has to be cured, or on occasion of an epidemic, but just because, by indolence and a habit of life...men fill themselves with waters and winds, as if their bodies were a marsh, compelling the ingenious sons of Asclepius to find more names for disease”. Plato The Republic 405[d]

4. Ethics and the Hippocratic Oath

The author highlighted one aspect of Hippocratic teaching in a poem published by him in the Lancet 1997;349:1561.

KOS

Dry hills, cool groves, stumbling waves,  
The island where priests healed  
and Hippocrates trod  
witnessed other waves:  
minoans, mycenians, dorians,  
persians, romans, byzantians,  
Knights of St. John, turks, Italians...  
and now  
a new wave of Europeans  
wielding  
cash and credit cards  
fuelling the clash and clang of commerce  
Suddenly  
amidst the dementing din  
a gust of silence ...  
and echoes  
of an ancient voice  
Hippocrates, speaking to his pupils:  
“Never do harm, always console, often diagnose, sometimes cure”.  
Sounding  
So remote  
So removed...  
So relevant

**Adjournment:** 22:30 p.m.

Recorded and respectfully submitted by Seyed Mirsattari, Secretary of LMHA