

The Hippocratic Oath: A Closer Look

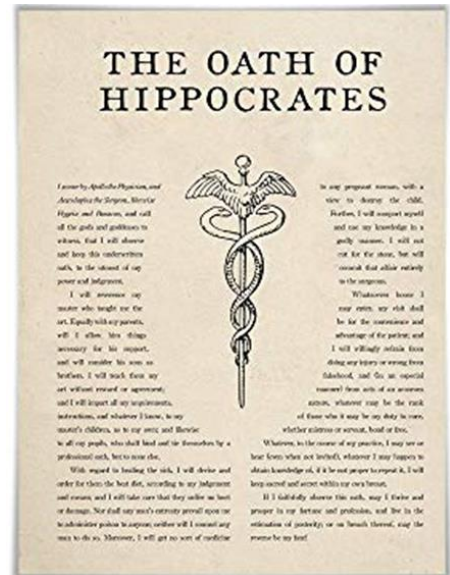
It is likely most people believe that **medical doctors** swear an allegiance to the **Hippocratic Oath**. It is also probably hoped that graduating doctors eagerly recite the noble refrain “First, do no harm” with reverence and use that phrase as their guiding medical principle. Interestingly however, the US Supreme Court rejected the oath as a guide to medical ethics and practices in **1973**, thus it is ‘optional’ for institutions to ask graduates to recite it, and only about **56%** of physicians do so. Even if a doctor were to take the oath, there is no direct punishment for breaking it. It would seem most people are unaware that many physicians do not swear by the Hippocratic Oath, nor is this oath binding in any way.

Everything deserves a closer look

What does the Hippocratic Oath actually say anyway? We will get to that momentarily, but it is interesting to see that this oath and the medical profession is commonly associated with the **Caduceus**, the symbol of a winged-staff with two intertwined spiraling serpents around it, as seen in a copy of the oath to the right.

What Exactly is the Hippocratic Oath?

The original text of the Hippocratic Oath is said to have been translated from Greek around **400 BC**. Have you read it? It is often lamented by caring people in this age of foisted pharmaceutical ‘*remedies*’ that things would be so much better “If only doctors would remember their Hippocratic Oath!” The cautionary lesson here is we might want to know what it is we are talking about. The nature of the oath might surprise some, after it is actually read. It is shown on page three, take a read. Please note, **the Oath does not open with nor contain the exact phrase "First, do no harm"**. Yet, if asked it’s likely a majority of people would confidently state that phrase as the key tenet of the Hippocratic Oath.



Even a routine reading of it reveals that the oath is different than expected, a good exercise in discovery. This oath is more a **pledge of debt** and **loyalty** of the new physician **to their teachers of this ‘art’**. In fact, it commands the student to hold their teachers as dear to them as their parents. The second paragraph reads as a pledge of allegiance to a secret league, not a promise to heal the sick and do them no harm.

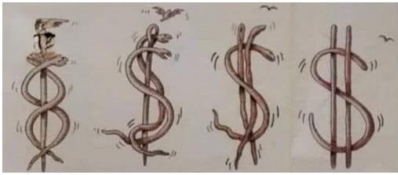
Over the centuries the Oath (or contract) has been re-written often in order to better suit the values of different times and cultures. Take a look at any ‘modernized’ oath and it is still an allegiance to their *club* more than anything else. The current oaths also make sure to remove the promise not to perform euthanasia or abortions, which is hardly in keeping with any ‘do no harm’ notion.

Symbols and Symbolism in Modern Medicine and Elsewhere



The most common symbol for modern medicine is the **Rod of Asclepius** (left), which has a **snake** coiled around a staff, named for Asclepius the god of healing and medicine in ancient Greek mythology. **Why a snake?** Though it is apt that poisonous serpents are associated with pharmacology. The use of this symbolism for modern medicine started circa 1900, near the time of the Flexner Report. Often confused with the Rod of Asclepius is the very similar **Caduceus** (right), though it has a staff entwined by **two serpents**, often surmounted by wings. The caduceus was carried by **Hermes** in Greek mythology as the symbol of **commerce** and the **underworld**.





It is interesting that both of these symbols resemble the **dollar sign**, which has a snake-like S coiling around either one or two staffs. Both of these symbols, the **Rod of Asclepius** and **Caduceus** can be found in other interesting places. As already noted, the dollar symbol (\$) is



related to both of these, thus the *commerce* connection is obvious. The caduceus can plainly be seen in the **U.S. Army Medical Corps** emblem (right), even though most references go to great lengths to make it clear that these two symbols are not to be conflated with each other! After all, the modern symbol for medicine is the Rod of Asclepius which has only *one snake* and *no wings* - that is *totally* different to having two serpents coiled like a double helix up a winged staff, right? However, the US Army Medical Corps created its Emblem (right) in **1908** and it is still used presently. So the two staffs are indeed conflated.



I don't know about you but when I think of dentistry I always think of snakes and intertwined triangles and circles. The current **Dental logo** adopted by the American Dental Association in 1965 is to the left. The explanation again is that the snake means 'healing'. The triangle is for the Greek letter Delta, now somehow a symbol of dentistry. The circle is for the Greek letter Omicron (like the infamous variant) because O is how the term odont starts. It just seems



a little over the top and heavy for a tooth doctor logo. The snakes and staff have also made their way into the **scales** of justice, take a look at right. Most are familiar with **lady justice**, that blindfolded woman associated with the law, but now we find **golden snake scales** symbolizing the impartial deliberation or "weighing" of two sides in a legal dispute. A little curious.



Also incorporating the old slippery snake and staff is the logo for the **World Health Organization** (left), showing the Rod of Asclepius superimposed on the azimuthal equidistant map of the world. Interesting. The World Health Organization certainly has significant influence on the medical industry and medical practices across the world. If you were to take a closer look at the map under the coiling serpent you'd see it's the same map used by the **United Nations**. And the world in that map is divided into **33** segments. Numbers are also symbolic and can convey very powerful information. When constructing

a message in symbolic terms, every particular aspect of its composition is meaningful, therefore every element in it is very thoughtful and deliberate. Also note on the logo that the continent of Antarctica is not shown on the map. It must be represented by the outermost wreath. For our current focus, it is enough to see that this snake and staff symbolism dominates extremely influential and 'controlling' entities around the world.

Back to Hermes for a moment. He was the Greek messenger god of **trade, thieves, sleep, negotiation, travelers** and a **guide to the underworld**. The Roman's called Hermes **Mercury**. He even has his own day of the week named after him. Wednesday (miércoles) is Mercury. Importantly, he was considered a trickster and carried his **magical wand** when escorting souls to the underworld. Below is a description of Hermes and his caduceus:

"With a touch of his caduceus, Hermes puts mortals to sleep or raises the dead. He cures any illness and changes whatever the wand touches into gold."

Whether the Rod of Asclepius or the Caduceus, both are an apt choice of mascot for all of these untrustworthy autocratic institutions. It seems that the intention of modern medicine is hidden in plain sight. The symbolism consistently associated with it is clearly acknowledging that modern medicine is focused on commerce, bands of thieves, and magic spells. After all, the etymology of the word **pharmaceutical** means **sorcerer**, **poisoner** and **witchcraft**.

Knowing a little more, perhaps re-read the original Hippocratic Oath, displayed in full below. It's almost written as if it's anticipating two different readers. One who understands and one who does not.

Original Hippocratic Oath

I swear by Apollo the physician, and Asclepius, and Hygeia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses as my witnesses, that, according to my ability and judgement, I will keep this Oath and this contract:

- **To hold him who taught me this art equally dear to me as my parents**, to be a partner in life with him, and to fulfill his needs when required; to look upon his offspring as equals to my own siblings, and to teach them this art, if they shall wish to learn it, without fee or contract; and that by the set rules, lectures, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of the art to my own sons, and those of my teachers, and to students bound by this contract and having sworn this Oath to the law of medicine, **but to no others**.
- I will use those **dietary regimens** which will benefit my patients according to my greatest ability and **judgement**, and **I will do no harm** or injustice to them.
- I will **not give a lethal drug to anyone** if I am asked, nor will I advise such a plan; and similarly I will **not** give a woman a pessary **to cause an abortion**.
- In purity and according to divine law will I carry out **my life and my art**.
- I will not use the knife, even upon those suffering from stones, but I will leave this to those who are trained in this craft.
- **Into whatever homes I go, I will enter them for the benefit of the sick**, avoiding any voluntary act of impropriety or corruption, including the seduction of women or men, whether they are free men or slaves.
- Whatever I see or hear in the lives of my patients, whether in connection with my professional practice or not, which ought not to be spoken of outside, I will keep secret, as considering all such things to be private.

So long as I maintain this Oath faithfully and without corruption, may it be granted to me to partake of life fully and the practice of my art, gaining the respect of all men for all time. However, should I transgress this Oath and violate it, may the opposite be my fate.

**Emphasis added.*