

Inspiration in medical art

La inspiración en el arte médico

JORGE C. TRAININI

After the historical process of positivist rationalism, physicians have not stopped thinking about a conceptual linearity of cause-effect. Random processes, transformation, multiplicity of causes and effects that have brought the knowledge of formal science closer, however, also have an active participation in the subject and his morbid process. Patient is subject to a changing behavior of his illness; so, the physician must analyze the process and the random behavior of the patient-disease system with the need for a permanent course correction. For this purpose, leaving aside the inductive solely in favor of the hypothetical-deductive can constitute an inconvenience, by annulling methodological complementarity with observation. There are clear examples of this intuitive observation throughout the history of medical knowledge evolution. We will mention some historical examples:

1. LAZARUS SPALLANZANI (1729-1799).

Casually and through observation, the visual assessment of blood circulation would correspond to the priest Lazarus Spallanzani, born in Scandiano, near Modena, in 1729. He was a teacher in the latter city and in Pavia. He wrote several works, among them “Del azione del mori ne´ vasi sanguigni” (Modena, 1768) and “De fenomeni della circolazione” (Modena, 1777). In 1771 he observed in a chicken embryo the red blood cells circulating from the arteries to

the veins. His account in 1773 describes the event in moving words: “*The room where I was had not enough light, and wanting to satisfy my need anyway, I decided to examine the egg in direct sunlight. Once the egg was placed in Lyonnet’s little machine, I soon directed the lens at it and, despite the great clarity that surrounded it, I was able, by sharpening my eyesight, to see the blood running through the complete circuit of the umbilical arterial and venous vessels. Seized then by unexpected joy I exclaimed eureka! eureka!*”. His phrase: “*The voice of nature must prevail over philosophy*” demonstrates his inductive character to research.

2. WILLIAM WITHERING (1741/1799).

He resided at Edgbaston Hall (Birmingham, England). In his office, the patients with hydropsy did not have a good evolution in their treatment. The sick then turned to a village healer, called Mother Hutton. In 1775, she told Withering about the good diuretic results that she obtained with some herbs known as digitalis. In 1785, Withering published the work “The Foxglove and some of its Medical Uses”, which contains reports on clinical tests and notes on the toxicity of digitalis purpurea, expressing “*this drug has a power on the heart that has not been observed with any other medicine*”. This episode marked the beginning of the medical use of digitalis.