



Medicine for Managers

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Sir Percivall Pott

Percivall Pott, born in London in 1714, was one of the great eighteenth century English surgeons. Often described as one of the founders of orthopaedic surgery and noted for his comprehensive surgical writings, he also made advances in medicine. He most notably identified the link between environmental factors and some forms of cancer, namely the development of scrotal sores and of cancer in men working as chimney sweeps in London.

Born in London, he was educated in Kent and was subsequently apprenticed to Edward Nourse, surgeon at St Bartholomew's Hospital.

He qualified after seven years, passing the examination of the Company of Barber Surgeons.

He received the Grand Diploma in recognition of his surgical skills at the age of 22. He became assistant surgeon at St Bartholomew's in 1745, promoted to full surgeon in 1749, a post he retained until 1787.

His skills were exceptional and it is reported that his ability exceeded even that of John Hunter (*Pott's pupil and recognised by the Royal College of Surgeons as its greatest surgeon, commemorated by naming the College's*

Hunterian Museum in his honour). Pott and Hunter are widely regarded as the two greatest surgeons of the eighteenth century.



Pott was famed for his dedication to the care of his patients and was probably the first doctor to write pamphlets for patients to educate them on their maladies and their care and treatment.

He wrote on a wide range of topics from head injuries to fractures and the pamphlets were very popular, selling at that time for over one shilling each.

In 1765, he was elected Master of the Company of Surgeons, the forerunner of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

In 1769 he published a book called *"Some Few Remarks upon Fractures and Dislocations"*. It was translated from English into Italian and French and was influential in the management of such conditions throughout Britain and Europe.

He taught widely and during the 1770s, he lectured on a range of surgical topics, the content of which survives in the University of Manchester library.

In 1786 he became the first honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. The following year, in 1887, he became a Governor of St Bartholomew's Hospital.

Pott identified, managed and wrote about a range of diseases, some of which bear his name.

Pott's Disease, first described in the Annals of Medicine, is tuberculosis of the spine.

Pott's Fracture Is a complex ankle fracture involving the tibia and fibula, characterised by breaks in one or more of the bones and typically caused by twisting or rotational ankle injuries.

Pott's Puffy Tumour is a rare but serious complication of frontal sinusitis, resulting in osteomyelitis of the frontal bone of the skull, leading to swelling of the forehead.

Another disease, recognised by Pott, is ***Chimney Sweep's Cancer***.

Pott reported in ***Chirurgical Observations relative to . . . Cancer of the Scrotum*** that the disease was peculiar to a particular group of people, chimney sweeps, and seemed to arise from the presence and persistence of soot lodging in the folds of the scrotum.

Pott did identify observations made by others up to 200 years earlier but his writings resulted in an outcry to change chimney sweeping practices, although some voices argued that Sweeps' Carcinoma was a small price to pay for

protection against chimney fires and smoke. As soon as Pott's work was accepted, scrotal cancer rates began to decline.

Pott's early investigations and writings thus represented an early contribution to the science of epidemiology and to the Chimney Sweepers Act (1788)

In 1756, Pott fractured his leg falling off his horse, suffering a compound fracture of the tibia. It is a matter of dispute whether the injury was what is now called a Pott's fracture. He was transported home where various surgeons opined that amputation was necessary because of the risk of sepsis and death.

However, Nourse, Pott's original teacher, insisted on keeping the wound and the leg clean and the fracture splinted. He ultimately made a complete recovery.

Percivall Pott was knighted by King George III in 1787 for contributions to Medicine and Surgery.

In his seventies, Pott became increasingly frail. Ignoring advice, at age 74, he embarked on a grand sick round in London.

When he returned he was clearly very unwell and he succumbed to pneumonia in December of 1788.

He is remembered, not only for his wide ranging observations and his detailed teaching about and documentation of diseases, but also for his kind and caring demeanour and thoughtfulness in managing his patients. He was said to be the most highly paid surgeon in London.

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