

## ACFW 2024 Virtual At-Home Conference

### HISTORICAL NOVEL MALPRACTICE HANDOUT

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1. Anachronisms are probably the #1 mistake – check your dates on everything, especially any mentioned materials such as books, magazines, etc. Don't assume anything you saw in a movie, or on TV, or read in another book is correct.

Example: Doctor in recent Hallmark Movie ran back to his office to grab his black bag before running to scene of a sick patient. Most doctors today don't carry one unless they're over the age of seventy. Most would have an emergency backpack with supplies – and might even carry an AED, automatic defibrillator device. The only exception to this is neurologists still carry a small bag of their testing “tools.”

2. Using techniques or drugs before the era they were invented in. (although you'd be surprised)

The first recorded plastic surgical repair using grafted tissue was done by Italian brothers in the 1400s!

A decent list for this can be found on Wikipedia called “Timeline of medicine and medical technology. Since it's Wikipedia, I'd still doublecheck.

3. Using the wrong medical term for the time. While you may find the same term used, make sure there's not a different meaning between past and present. (I will soon post a handout on my Historical Novel Malpractice page with a list)
4. Not having differences of opinion between doctors. Even doctors to the King argued as to the best course of treatment – out of earshot from the King, of course.
5. Plausibility versus actual general usage. What's plausible may or may not be believable for the time. Don't have your rural doctor in the 1800s come up with a bone marrow transplant. New technique for splinting a fracture? Sure.
6. Location relative to the “locus” of medical information. Rural doctors, before the mailing of regular medical journals in the 1800s (again, the more rural, the less chance of this), had to rely on the medical knowledge from their training.

One issue I had with Dr. Quinn was her seemingly vast knowledge of medicine, which is fine when she first arrives fresh from the East. But years later, unless she was regularly reading every medical journal, she was too isolated to keep up. There weren't any continuing medical courses back then. She could have taken a sabbatical and gone back to train with a mentor, which some rural doctors did.

Doctors located in or near towns and cities had the advantage of local medical societies, which met regularly and discussed new things, and listened to speakers. Some of these societies published a journal, and some still do.

By “locus” I mean – Medieval monastery or library with manuscripts; medical school; hospital; or a famous doctor such as Hippocrates or Galen. Today we would talk about Mayo, Hopkins, Sloan-Kettering, MD Anderson, etc – where the cutting edge of medicine is being practiced.

7. For research:

- Public libraries
- Private libraries, like the Filson
- National Archives has a History of Medicine section
- Medical School libraries – often have a history of medicine section or room, they may even have diaries and records from alumni that were donated. This is where you will find the old medical books as well.
- Private collections
- Historical Societies
- State and local archives
- Genealogical Societies
- History museums – particular pharmacy and medical
- Famous doctor’s houses that are now museums
- Interview librarians and historians
- Talk to college history professors in the area – they may have a special interest or can refer you to someone who does
- Newspapers, both local and regional
- Textbooks – look for those published by Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, etc. institutions known for academic rigor. (at least before about a decade ago)
- Books/articles by actual historians, not someone doing it as a hobby
- Books/articles by medical doctors looking into the history of medical things – these can most likely be trusted, but verify if you can.

8. Research in proportion to the amount of medical material or the importance of the medical character in your story. (i.e. Don’t go down the rabbit hole) You wouldn’t do all of the above for a sprained ankle. You might want to though, if you have an actual historical figure in the book, or your main character is a fictional doctor who makes a breakthrough discovery.

9. Techniques and discoveries from the past *can* be rediscovered in old manuscripts or books. This happens a lot, even today.

10. SOURCES:

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/index.html>

<https://hopkinshistoryofmedicine.org/html> (publish Bulletin of the History of Medicine)

**Medical Heritage Library** – part of the Digital Public Library of America

<https://historyofmedicine.com/> History of Medicine and the Life Sciences An annotated digital bibliography, multiple editions.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/pulmonary/papers/ox-hist/ox-hist-intro.html> --History of oxygen therapy

*Fabulous* Wikipedia Timeline of Medicine -- Google it!

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_medicine\\_and\\_medical\\_technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_medicine_and_medical_technology)

ACFW's own **CAROL ASHBY** – Roman History Database <https://carolashby.com>

Don't forget PUBMED if you want primary sources. I was shocked to find the oldest references date to the 1600s! Only three of them, but still. That's old!

Questions?

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