

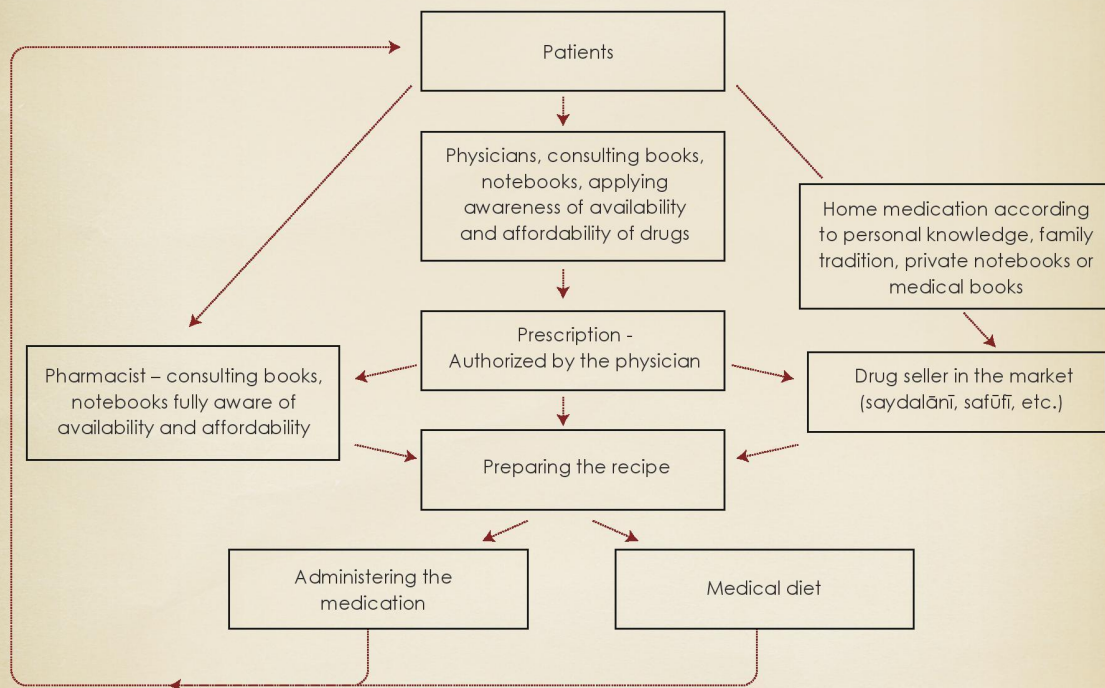
Medical Issues in the Genizah

Health was as important an issue in the medieval Near East as it is today, perhaps even more so. Testimony to this fact can be found in the wide range of Genizah fragments that concern healing procedures, uses of and trade in medicinal substances, and the actions and deeds of medical personnel.

Medicine as a prominent subject in the Genizah has been given its due attention only in recent decades, with the publication of a few articles by various Genizah scholars, a chapter in Goitein's "A Mediterranean Society", and mainly a catalogue of medical and para-medical manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collection by Isaacs (comprises brief descriptions only of 1,616 fragments). During the last decade an interdisciplinary group of scholars heading by Prof. Efraim Lev has been working on these issues.

By identifying and studying Genizah manuscripts dealing with medical issues, a unique window is created into the world of practical medicine and pharmacology of the Jewish community, as well as the theoretical medical knowledge that community members had access to or created themselves. The resulting synthesis of the practical and theoretical knowledge of medicine achieved by this community is presented here in the next few posters and provides a unique insight into the wider 'Mediterranean society' of the time. The diagram below presents one of our general insights.

Reconstruction of the treatment cycle in medieval Cairo



Future projects:

Top-ranking significance is given to the "medical book shelf"; over the last few years the team has been in the process of reconstructing the medical library of the Genizah practitioners on the basis of the Cairo Genizah fragments, i.e., the theoretical knowledge that was at the disposal of the Jewish medical practitioners in Medieval Cairo. Closely connected with the above-mentioned work and projects is the discovery through Genizah fragments of original or unknown medical books, including lost Classical and Arabic medical texts. One of the future projects the team is working on is a comprehensive study of Jewish medical practitioners in Medieval Egypt. This project named: "Prosopography of Jewish Medical Practitioners in Medieval Egypt" is based mainly on data from Genizah documents and Muslim/Arabic sources.