



HOSPITALS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

International Conference

Warsaw, May 18th–20th 2023

Crisis is a term which is central to ancient medicine and determines the moment when the decision is made about the progress of a disease either resulting in recovery or death so that it is too late to enter a hospital. It was only in the 17th century that „crisis“ included problematic situations on a more generalised personal or political level. Nevertheless, hospitals in history and in the present are closely linked to crisis in a modern sense. Becoming ill has always been taken as a personal crisis and most patients who enter hospital hope to leave very much better, even if this is accompanied by a fear that hospital care might not help – the janus-face of crisis.

On a more general level hospitals had usually been founded as a reaction to critical circumstances. Since medieval times poverty and the fight against begging are usually mentioned by the authorities in the context of hospital foundations. At the same time rich hospital founders were often motivated by the hope to facilitate their passage to paradise by donating huge amounts of property to pious purposes.

Beyond serving the poor, many hospitals have been founded in order to fight specific diseases stemming from certain physical and mental conditions, such as medieval leprosaria, early modern isolation and quarantine centres, lunatic asylums, 19th-century cholera hospitals, underlining their role in coping with the crises caused by epidemics. A special case are hospitals created during war and institutionalised health care facilities within military services.

Finally, hospitals ran into crises themselves. Like today, hospitals in the past had to compete in a medical market-place. Losing the confidence of the patients, of the physicians and nursing staff, or the corporations running these institutions and authorities responsible for organising healthcare could lead some hospitals into bankruptcy, while others flourished during times of wealth and prosperity. Different pressure groups might also have made large investments in institutionalised in-patient health care, a central point in public and political discourse.

The conference is organised by Michał Kopczyński (Faculty of History, University of Warsaw and Polish History Museum) and Fritz Dross (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Institut für Geschichte und Ethik der Medizin) together with the International Network for the History of Hospitals (INHH) and the German Association for the History of Hospitals (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Krankenhausgeschichte, DGKG). We aim at addressing the history of hospitals in the broadest chronological and geographical sense from a wide range of perspectives, including social history and urban history, the history of architecture, the history of medicine and many other areas, leading to a fruitful and innovative discussion of the history of hospitals.

Proposals for 20 minute papers given in English and addressing the conference theme are welcome from scholars all around the globe. We explicitly encourage PhD students and those at an early stage in their academic careers to submit proposals. Engagement concerning the conference theme would be assured by addressing one of the key questions under discussion:

- hospitals in the face of social, religious, political, and economic crisis
- hospitals during major epidemics and as places for the containment of infectious diseases in a broad historical perspective (including e.g. leprosy, plague, TB, and Covid)
- hospitals and military conflict/warfare
- hospitals running into crises, as in the case of bankruptcy or failures of care
- hospitals as a means of coping with personal crises, such as mental illness

We are willing to publish high-quality conference papers in a peer-reviewed conference volume.

Upon provision of full receipts, we hope to be able to support attendance at this conference, particularly for postgraduates and early career researchers. Speakers will be asked to make use of alternative sources of funding where these are available.

Submissions including abstracts of maximum of 300 words in length, in English and accompanied by a brief biography of no more than 200 words and any other queries regarding the conference may be sent by email to crisis@hospitalgeschichte.de until October 15, 2022.