

Black Death Station #4

Responses

Prevention, Treatment, Reactions...

#1.

PREVENTION: Primary Source: from Boccaccio's *Decameron*

"No human wisdom or foresight had any value: enormous amounts of refuse [garbage] and manure were removed from the city by appointed officials, the sick were barred from entering the city, and many instructions were given to preserve health; just as useless were the humble supplications [prayers] to God given not one time but many times in appointed processions, and all the other ways devout people called on God; despite all this, at the beginning of the spring of that year, that horrible plague began with its dolorous effects in a most awe-inspiring manner, as I will tell you."

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#2.

REACTION: Primary Source: from Boccaccio's *Decameron*

“Others were of the opinion that they should **live moderately and guard against all excess**; by this means they would avoid infection. Having withdrawn, **living separate from everybody else, they settled down and locked themselves in, where no sick person or any other living person could come, they ate small amounts of food and drank the most delicate wines and avoided all luxury, refraining from speech with outsiders, refusing news of the dead or the sick or anything else, and amusing themselves with music or whatever else was pleasant.**”

Others, who disagreed with this, believed that **drinking beer, enjoying oneself, and going around singing and ruckus-raising and satisfying all one's appetites whenever possible and laughing at the whole bloody thing was the best medicine**; and these people put into practice what they heartily advised to others: day and night, going from tavern to tavern, drinking without moderation or measure, and many times going from house to house drinking up a storm and only listening to and talking about pleasing things.”

“With so much sickness and misery, **all respect for the laws, both of God and of man, fell apart** and dissolved, because the ministers and executors of the laws were either dead or ill like everyone else, or were left with so few officials that they were unable to do their duties; as a result, **everyone was free to do whatever they pleased.**”

Others held a more cruel opinion, one that in the end probably guaranteed their safety, saying that there **was no better or more effective medicine against the disease than to run away from it**; convinced by this argument, and caring for no-one but themselves, **huge numbers of men and women abandoned their rightful city, their rightful homes, their relatives and their parents and their things, and sought out the countryside**, as if the wrath of God would punish the evils/sins of men with this plague based on where they happened to be, as if the wrath of God was stirred against only those who unfortunately found themselves within the city walls, or as if the whole of the population of the city would be exterminated in its final hour.

“**One citizen avoided another, everybody neglected their neighbors and rarely or never visited their parents and relatives unless from a distance**; the ordeal had so withered the hearts of men and women that brother abandoned brother, and the uncle abandoned his nephew and the sister her brother and many times, wives abandoned their husbands, and, what is even more incredible and cruel, mothers and fathers abandoned their children and would refuse to visit them.”

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#3.

Cures for the Black Death

'Cures' for the Black Death went from the absurd to having a degree of common sense about them.

Vinegar and water treatment	If a person gets the disease, they must be put to bed. They should be washed with vinegar and rose water
Lancing the buboes	The swellings associated with the Black Death should be cut open to allow the disease to leave the body. A mixture of tree resin, roots of white lilies and dried human excrement should be applied to the places where the body has been cut open.
Bleeding	The disease must be in the blood. The veins leading to the heart should be cut open. This will allow the disease to leave the body. An ointment made of clay and violets should be applied to the place where the cuts have been made.
Diet	We should not eat food that goes off easily and smells badly such as meat, cheese and fish. Instead we should eat bread, fruit and vegetables
Sanitation	The streets should be cleaned of all human and animal waste. It should be taken by a cart to a field outside of the village and burnt. All bodies should be buried in deep pits outside of the village and their clothes should also be burnt.
Pestilence medicine	Roast the shells of newly laid eggs. Ground the roasted shells into a powder. Chop up the leaves and petals of marigold flowers. Put the egg shells and marigolds into a pot of good ale. Add treacle and warm over a fire. The patient should drink this mixture every morning and night.
Witchcraft	Place a live hen next to the swelling to draw out the pestilence from the body. To aid recovery you should drink a glass of your own urine twice a day.

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#4.

Lack of medical knowledge meant that people tried anything to help them escape the disease. It was common belief at the time that the plague was due to God's wrath, caused by the sins of mankind. **Flagellants** wanted to show their love of God by travelling from town to town whipping themselves, hoping that God would forgive them of their sins and that they would be spared the Black Death.

#5.

Flagellants at Doornik (Belgium) in 1349

