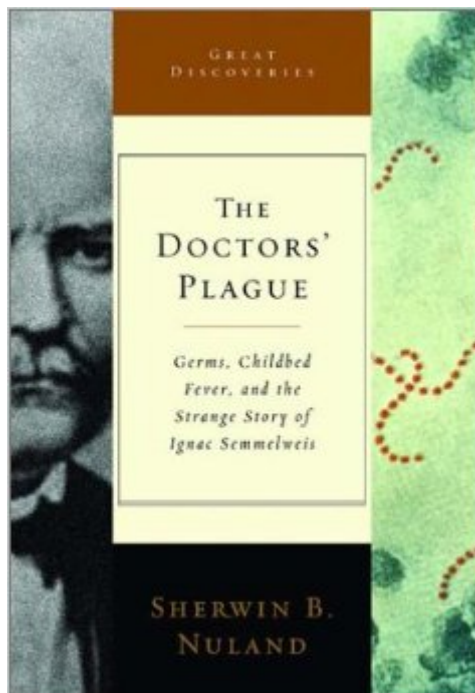


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The Doctors' Plague: Germs, Childbed Fever, And The Strange Story Of Ignac Semmelweis (Great Discoveries)



Synopsis

Ignac Semmelweis is remembered for the now commonplace notion that must wash their hands before examining patients. In mid-19th century Vienna, however, this was a subversive idea. This is the revealing narrative of one of the key turning points in medical history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Many years ago, I read a story about Ignac Semmelweis that made him out to be a demigod. According to the legend, Semmelweis was a martyr to the cause of saving women from unnecessary deaths due to puerperal or childbed fever. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, childbed fever was ubiquitous and very often fatal in Europe and America. In his fascinating new book, "The Doctors' Plague," Sherwin P. Nuland traces the history of this tragic disease and he sheds some light on how and why the medical profession was helpless to prevent it for so many years. Nuland goes back to the great physician Hippocrates, who, over two thousand years ago, described childbed fever with great accuracy. For all of his powers of observation, Hippocrates knew nothing about the causes of the disease or how to prevent it. For many years, physicians promulgated wild theories, blaming the new mother's milk, bad air, suppression of discharges, and other equally irrelevant factors for the large number of infections that killed new mothers in hospitals. The figures tell the tragic story. At the London General Lying-In Hospital, between 1833 and 1842, 587 women per thousand died of childbed fever. The mortality statistics were similar in hospitals throughout Europe and the United States. Ignac Semmelweis was born in Hungary. As a

practicing doctor of obstetrics, he was appalled by the large number of women dying in childbirth. Because he was a keenly observant doctor who kept careful records and because he had a sharp, logical mind, Semmelweis eventually concluded that childbed fever was somehow passed to women from their doctors, nurses, and dirty bed linens.

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