

2nd International Conference on the History of Health: Epidemiology and Health Infrastructure in European History (19th–21st Century)

From 9 to 11 December 2024, the *2nd International Conference on the History of Health: Epidemiology and Health Infrastructure in European History (19th–21st Century)* took place in the Museum of Health and Pharmacy in Lisbon. The conference was organised by a consortium of academic partners, primarily the Interuniversity Centre for the History of Science and Technology (CIUHCT) in Lisbon, NOVA FCT, FCUL, CHSTM, the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Lab2PT, IN2PAST, the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Minho, the Museum of Health and Pharmacy in Lisbon and COST Action – EuroHealthHist.

Two professors, Isabel Amaral and Alexandra Estevez, meticulously managed the organisational logistics of the conference together with their PhD students in medical history from Portugal and Brazil. Their joint work ensured the smooth running of the academic event and drew on their extensive expertise in the history of medicine.

The aim of the conference was an in-depth, comparative study of health infrastructures and epidemiological practises in Europe, as well as in South and Central America, since the 19th century. Over three days, more than 30 speakers from Europe, Brazil, and Mexico presented their own research on the development of public health infrastructures, responses to epidemics and health crises, the role of medical and scientific institutions in shaping health policy, and the impact of social, political and economic factors on public health systems. The keynote speaker was Professor of Health History Barry Doyle from the University of Manchester, a historian specialising in the development of hospitals, healthcare in colonial and post-colonial British and French West Africa, and first aid in Britain and France.

The conference sections comprehensively examined critical medical challenges, focussing on the treatment of infectious diseases such as cholera, smallpox,

tuberculosis, and tropical diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, sleeping sickness, and AIDS. Discussions also centred on co-infections, co-epidemics, the development of health systems, and the development of hospitals and sanatoria for the treatment of these diseases. The participants took a critical look at the introduction of vaccines, their public acceptance, and the long-term social stigmas that affect the health of the population. The diversity of the speakers was also reflected in their educational backgrounds, as they came from different areas of the humanities and medicine. The contribution of young researchers currently working on or have completed a dissertation in the field of medical history was particularly valuable. The organisers made a special effort to include them in the conference.

On the first evening of the conference, the speakers were invited to visit the Museum of Health and Pharmacy, a cultural jewel located in two cities in Lisbon and Porto. They were guided through its medical and pharmaceutical history by the erudite Dr João Neto, the museum's charismatic director. This remarkable institution is far more than a simple collection of medical curiosities. Since its foundation in 1996, the museum has compiled a panoramic view of the worldwide development of healthcare and exhibited more than 15,000 artefacts documenting 5,000 years of medical innovation. Supported by the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society and a network of passionate donors, the museum's collections offer visitors a profound journey through time, showing how different cultures have approached healing, pharmacy, and medical practises.

Three Slovenian researchers in the field of medical history took part in the conference: Prof. Dr Mojca Ramšak from the University of Ljubljana, who also co-organised the event, together with Dr Katarina Keber, Senior Research Associate, and Jaroš Krivec, MA, a young researcher from the Milko Kos Institute of the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Their presentations focussed on the 19th-century cholera and smallpox epidemics on Slovenian territory and offered a nuanced exploration of local health challenges. Through their insights into the systemic and subjective dimensions of these epidemics, the Slovenian researchers enriched the conference's interdisciplinary dialogue on medical experiences and revealed the complex interplay between national health history and broader regional trends.

The conference successfully brought together a diverse group of scholars who contributed to a deeper understanding of historical epidemiological challenges and the development of health infrastructure. The combination of established academics and emerging researchers, as well as the interdisciplinary approach encompassing both the humanities and medicine, fostered rich discussions and new perspectives. The choice of the Museum of Health and Pharmacy in Lisbon as

the venue proved particularly appropriate, as it offered participants tangible links to the history of medicine through its extensive collection. This conference not only facilitated a valuable academic exchange but also demonstrated the continued relevance of historical health studies for understanding today's public health challenges.

Mojca Ramšak



Figure 1. Prof. Isabel Amaral and Prof. Mojca Ramšak, Lisbon, Museum of Health and Pharmacy