

Hadassah for the Health of the People

The Health Education Mission of Hadassah The American Zionist Women in the Holy Land

Shifra Shvarts and Zipora Shehory-Rubin, Dekel Academic Press, 2012, 296 pages

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The year 2012 witnessed some significant centenaries related to the history of medicine in Israel. The beginnings of the Israel Medical Association date back to January 1912 when six Jewish physicians and one pharmacist met in Jaffa and founded the Jaffa Hebrew Medical Society. Just a few weeks earlier, Jewish workers in the Land of Israel, as Shifra Shvarts herself recorded in her history of *Kupat Holim* (health funds), resolved to set up a workers' health fund. In this book, published as an e-book, Shvarts and Shehory-Rubin turn to the history of the involvement of health in the Holy Land by the American Women Zionists of Hadassah, which also celebrated its centenary in 2012.

This book provides a detailed account of the story of how Hadassah came to be seen as a major funder of health institutions and provider of health care in Israel from its modest beginnings in 1912. In 1909 Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, had been shocked by the poor conditions prevailing in the provision of health care in Ottoman Palestine. By 1912 Hadassah had been formed and the following year Hadassah's involvement in the direct provision of health care began through the employment of two American nurses who would work in Jerusalem.

As an institutional history with information culled from a rigorous examination of all the available sources, this book is particularly strong in recounting the details of the Hadassah story in all its aspects in the early formative years. It faithfully notes the remarkable scope of Hadassah's work and the remarkable vision that enabled it to take the form it adopted and to expand into so many areas of health care. Hadassah's mission was not

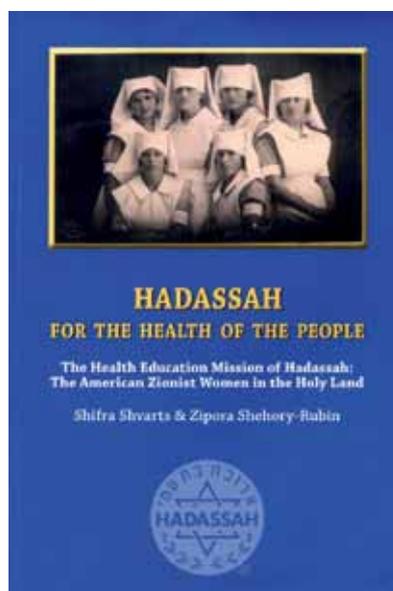
limited to community clinics or health dispensaries but saw its goal as providing a full range of medical and preventive health facilities including the establishment of sophisticated hospital facilities.

Institutional histories like this often look exclusively at themselves and ignore the patterns of care and changes in health care delivery in the wider world. This is a pity as the achievements of Hadassah stand in comparison with the best of medical activities in western countries despite the low base that pertained when their work began in Jerusalem a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, there is plenty of information here to make an assessment of what Hadassah has achieved by its centenary year, and the story as it unfolds explains why American women Zionists are entitled to feel a sense of pride in what their investment in health care in Israel has produced. This is not to say that Hadassah was always able to pay for all the funding needs of the growing *yishuv* (Jewish

community in Eretz Israel) and the book records the supplementary health funding paid, for example by Jewish schools and the parents of their pupils.

There were also disputes between Hadassah in America and their health care workers on the ground regarding funding needs. These disputes were often related to specific issues as the size of the *yishuv* grew and consequently the nature and complexity of health needs proliferated. Further, there were disagreements with the Mandatory Government, which saw its role as providing the most basic of public health measures and hospital buildings for the whole population allied to proper regulation of medical care and registration of physicians. They had no interest in the development of an integrated community-wide health service that the *yishuv* demanded and indicated that funding for the Jewish sector would have to await a leveling of health care provision between all the population groups. The difference between Jewish expectation and Government delivery grew over the period of the Mandate, and despite the insistence by Hadassah that their facilities were available to all, ethnic health disparities between the Jewish and Arab sectors also increased.

The history of Hadassah has been well documented over the years and readers will likely want to know how this book differs from previous accounts of the story. This book is much stronger than its predecessors on the continuing medical issues throughout the early years of the story and gives the reader a clear insight into the efforts and struggles that characterized the history of Hadassah over its first decades. It details, for example, the working conditions of health staff, records their salaries, and notes the



content and context of their work. Further, in the crucial health work carried out in the schools of the *yishuv* in the mandatory era there are good accounts of the processes involved in the delivery of care on a day-to-day basis. While some might find the detail in such sections as “Supervision of School Hiking Trips and Examination of their Impact on Students” somewhat tedious, in the context of providing a complete account of the extent of Hadassah’s reach such material is invaluable.

One quibble for me is the running of reference numbers through the book and not having a separate numbering sequence for each chapter. This makes it more difficult to relate references to the text. I suspect that in the printed version used for this review this is less a problem than it will be in the electronic

edition where footnotes rather than endnotes would work better. The benefit of electronic printing is that typing errors in the text can be quickly corrected on an ongoing basis and additional information inserted. Thus, the recording of edition timings becomes critical in such an academic work.

The book also contains a special dedication to Prof. Samuel Kottek, the acknowledged mentor of the authors, who immigrated to Israel in 1975. Besides his devoted care of sick children, he has raised, through his academic work, generations of medical historians in their studies of medicine from Jewish sources: Bible, Talmud and medieval medical authors such as Maimonides.

The book also benefits from a generous quantity of illustrations. Beginning with

the famous photograph of the two American nurses Rachel Landy and Rachel Kaplan with Hadassah founder Eva Leon in Jerusalem taken in 1913, the illustrations complement the text beautifully.

This book will be an invaluable source of detailed information about the history of Hadassah in its formative years and stands as a valuable testimony to practical Zionism, shown in the devotion and care of its American supporters and those in Israel who deliver its services.

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The Last Best Cure

Donna Jackson Nakazawa, Penguin Group, USA, March 2013 [jacksondj@aol.com]

In her new book, *The Last Best Cure*, award-winning science journalist Donna Jackson Nakazawa, author of *The Autoimmune Epidemic*, reports on recent findings from the field of psychoneuroimmunology. Nakazawa presents the latest neuroscience on how state of mind and mood influence stress hormone and cytokine activity, and how chronic stress plays an important role in inflammation, autoimmune disease and other health disorders.

Today, more adults suffer from chronic health conditions than ever before – with rates of those afflicted rising steadily. Experts predict that the number of chronically ill will rise 37% by 2030. Nakazawa writes about the importance of a paradigm shift in medicine, one that incorporates a new understanding of the brain-body connection, both for patients struggling with chronic illness and the physicians who hope to help them.

Nakazawa also reports on new findings on how adverse childhood experiences alter the stress response, playing a role in adult chronic illness. Teaming up with Anastasia Rowland-Seymour MD, Director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and assistant professor at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Nakazawa tries, on herself, well-studied brain-body approaches including meditation, mindfulness and yoga, to see if they might help provide relief from her own high inflammatory markers and autoimmune conditions. Rowland-Seymour tests Nakazawa for stress and immune biomarkers at the beginning of Nakazawa’s year-long brain-body experiment, and again at the end. The changes in Nakazawa’s immunological function prove significant. In *The Last Best Cure*, Nakazawa and Rowland-Seymour demonstrate how patients and physicians can work together to explore

brain-body approaches that may indeed help to re-regulate the stress response and activate healing, improving emotional and physical patient well-being.

