Title: “Decision is difficult” (ἡ δὲ κρίσις χαλεπή): medical decision making in the Hippocratic Corpus

Much of the recent literature in the field of ancient medicine has focused on patients’ experiences of health and disease (Holmes 2010, Thumiger and Petridou 2016), on the characterization of many types of healer in the “medical market place” (Israelowich 2015), on patients’ choices regarding health and disease (ibid.), and on the relationship between the healer and the patient (Thumiger and Petridou 2016). This paper offers a different approach to studies of the physician-patient relationship by asking, with specific reference to the Hippocratic Corpus, how did physicians make decisions regarding diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment? It will be argued that attention to the words κρίνω and κρίσις, and their associated adjectival forms, reveals that perceptions regarding the ease of clinical decision making are related to the Hippocratic authors’ perceptions of the ease with which they can classify the health problems they observe. This paper expands upon Langholf’s previous work on the concept of κρίσις (1990) by focusing on how this family of words characterizes the nature of the relationship between the Hippocratic physician and the disease, and how differences in the process and manifestation of a κρίσις signal decision points regarding prognosis, diagnosis, and treatment. Though the disease itself reaches a κρίσις (which can be δύσκριτα or εύκριτα) – or may fail to reach a κρίσις (άκρισιά) – the disease itself is through this process presenting a set of observations that are essential for the physician’s next decision. Analysis of these decision-making words provides insight into an early process of information management in a medical setting.

This paper actively engages with contemporary literature about medical decision making (e.g., Groopman 2007) and contributes to the ongoing dialogue about how physician decision making can be optimized to yield positive outcomes in modern contexts. It also demonstrates the applicability of the lessons of ancient medicine to pressing problems in healthcare today.

Bibliography


**AV Needs**
A projector to show a PowerPoint presentation, including a cable that can be connected from the projector to an HDMI port.