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Opinion

The conspiracy against the uterus*

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Hysterectomy in historical perspective

Understanding the origins of gynecology is fundamental to the interpretation of today's clinical practice of female reproductive medicine. Indeed, the 19th century origins of gynecological practice are rooted in belief systems that have victimized women throughout the ages — belief systems which may reinforce the male drive to take control of women [1,2].

Language reflects these belief systems: the uterus is the 'hysterical', wandering organ, inflicting disease upon women. According to ancient Greek connotations, it is the source of 'instability, anger, crying, emotional outbursts, and depression, [...] hypochondriasis, [...] and] seduction' [3]. Hippocrates (450-370 B.C.) said of the uterus that it often went wild when not fed with male sperm [4].

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the female organs were perceived as dominating a woman's physiology. In 1849, Dr. Fredrick Hollick wrote, 'The Uterus [...] is the *controlling* organ in the female body, being the most excitable of all, and so intimately connected, by the ramifications of its numerous nerves, with every other part' [5].

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