



HISTORY OF DERMATOLOGY

## THE SANTA MARIA DEGLI INCURABILI HOSPITAL: IT'S ROLE IN THE HISTORY OF DERMATOLOGY.

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The Santa Maria degli Incurabili Hospital, more simply known as the Incurabili, began its activity on March 23, 1522, when a group of patients were led in procession from the San Nicola Hospital situated near the port of Naples to the present location of the Incurabili on Caponapoli Hill. The Incurabili was founded thanks to the benevolence of Maria Lorenza Longo, a Spanish noble woman who devoted her life and spent her money on helping the needy and ill.

In time, the original building incorporated a number of other buildings to form what was to become the principal hospital complex in Italy and of the Mediterranean area. Very early on the major activity of the Incurabili Hospital was devoted to treating people who had contracted syphilis, a disease which at the time was considered "incurable", hence the name of the Hospital. In fact, a syphilis epidemic had already occurred in the city of Naples in 1495 during the invasion by the French army led by the French King, Charles VIII (In Italy the disease was known as the "French Disease"). It was the first recorded epidemic of syphilis in Europe, and eventually the disease spread throughout all Italy and Europe.

From the very beginning, the doctors at the Incurabili developed new treatments and instruments for the treatment of syphilis, for example, calomel unguents. Later, a pharmacy and several laboratories were set up to prepare galenic formulations that were made to be sent to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and other states in Europe.

In addition, the hospital became famous for its state-of-the-art techniques in obstetrics. The cloister of the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, also known as "The Maternity Cloister", carries the following inscription: "Any woman, rich or poor, patrician or plebeian, native or foreign, as long as she is pregnant, can knock on our door, it will be opened".

It naturally followed that any person, rich or poor, with any type of illness or disease had access to the Incurabili. As an example, in 1752 Dr. Carlo Curzio diagnosed the first case of scleroderma in a 17-year-old girl, nicknamed "the tree woman" due to the wooden appearance of her skin, and after several studies he intuited that the illness was an inflammatory systemic disease.

Despite the expansion in the types of illnesses and diseases treated at the Incurabili Hospital beyond syphilis, the name of the Hospital still recalls its association with the treatment of syphilitic patients, the "incurable" - in Italian, the "Incurabili".

