Avecenna was the most famous physician of the Persian world. He was born near Bukhara, Iran, in 980 A.D. Son of a tax-collector, he was an infant prodigy, able to recite the entire Koran at the age of 10. He received all the education that the cultivated Arab world of the time could offer. He studied medicine at Baghdad and was qualified to practice and teach medicine at the age of 16!!

Avecenna was in the employment of several Muslim rulers, but political instability was so much, that although this brought him fame, money, and chance to do research, it also placed his life in danger more than once. He had to remain in hiding many times, even though he was the greatest physician of medieval times.

Avecenna’s most important compilation was the Canon (al qanun Fi-l-tibb) of medicine, a system presented in five parts. This monumental treatise, a huge encyclopedia of medicine, took many years to assemble. Although it is based on the works of Galen and Hippocrates, it contains many original observations as well. It included anatomy, physiology, medicine, surgery, obstetrics, psychiatry and materia medica. It was referred to as ‘The most famous medical book even written’ at one time; Canon’s million words were both wise and absurd but was followed, for 6 centuries thereafter by the medical schools of Asia and Europe, as a standard text.

Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, a great Jewish-Arabian Physician, was born in Cordova, Spain, in the Western Caliphate. Cordova was the centre of Jewish learning for several centuries, where Jews and Arabs were given equal opportunity to study philosophy, theology, law and medicine. In his youth Maimonides took full advantage of the intellectual freedom, subject to restriction of Arab authorities.

At that time, there was apparent decadence of Arabian medicine and century was to pass before the acceptance of leadership by French and Italian school. In 1148, with the subjugation of Cordova by Almohadas (Unitarian), Jews were given the choice of embracing Islam or leaving the country. Maimonide’s father was true to Jewish faith and their wanderings began, compelling them to reside temporarily in the provinces of Spain, Morocco and Palestine.

Maimonides probably acquired his medical training in Fez, Morocco, where he stayed for several years. Eventually he settled in Cairo in 1165, when he was 30. He continued both as Rabbi and Judge, but medicine occupied greater portion of his time. His practice was built upon manuscripts of the ancients, being supplemented by clinical experience and scientific education. Maimonides reached the high position as the Court physician to the Grand Vazir Al Fadil and Sultan Saladin, the enlightened Moslem Sultan, who recaptured Jerusalem in 1187.

The treatises were written in the later decades of his life. His three well-known works are Poisons and antidotes, Regimen Sanitatis and Medical aphorisms. The last contains dictums, which are based upon the pronouncement of Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna. Poisons and antidotes, was translated into several languages and was a standard volume for several centuries. In Regimen Sanitatis, he emphasised
on diet and good rules of health, rather than on drugs.

Maimonides appreciated that physical condition may be influenced by mental state, which was regarded only by Avicenna earlier. He relied upon philosophy in the practice of medicine and used his clinical skill and experience in elucidation of theology. He insisted on treating the person as a whole and integrated the concept of body and soul.