

VESTAL, OPHELIA D.

NATIVE INDIAN DOCTORS.

10572

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Native Indian Doctors

Among the Creek Indians certain old women were once renowned for their medical skill, especially in the treatment of gunshot wounds. Chitto Harjo, better known as Crazy Snake, sought one of them after he was shot in the leg in a fight with officers at his home near Pierce. The knowledge of surgery and medicine possessed by these women was of the most primitive kind. It came down through generations, and much of tribal myth and superstitions entered into their practice. They never attempted amputations and relied principally upon poultices of herbs.

The practice of these women doctors is said to have been similar to that of the men doctors of whom more is known. These women doctors would forbid any person, even the father or the mother, to come near the patient, for whom they became both physician and nurse, staying beside the patient day and night. A young man or woman, unmarried, could come within speaking distance to inquire about the patient's health.

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Regardless of where the wound was inflicted, the patient was required to fast four days, the doctor joining in the fast. In the next four days the patient was allowed to take light nourishment such as "sofka", a kind of boiled corn. Then followed soup containing wild meat, such as quail or squirrel.

The wound was dressed twice each day and once each night and was probed with feathers of the horned owl. These feathers were also used in washing the wound and in applying the medicine. After about eight days young and unmarried people were allowed to call on the patient.

The removal of a bullet from a man's body without use of a knife was not beyond the skill of these Indian women. The doctor examined the wound to determine the size of the opening then took from her collection of hollow cane reeds, one that fit the wound. The end of the reed was inserted into the wound after being hollowed evenly and smoothly. Little by little the reed was inserted until it touched the bullet, the doctor holding her ear close to the end of the reed to hear the impact. The hollow end of the reed was then gradually placed over

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the bullet. The Indian doctor, by suction, tried gently to dislodge the bullet and continued in this manner until the bullet had been withdrawn from the wound. After the bullet had been extracted the doctor resumed the use of the feathers and used no other instrument.