

Introduction

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The treatment of war wounds is as ancient as warfare itself. The Edwin Smith papyrus has been dated to 1600 BC and is the oldest known treatise on trauma surgery and anatomy. The history of battlefield surgery is the history of surgical advancement and the importance of the medical lessons learned from war have long been recognised. While almost every conflict has served to increase our knowledge of the treatment of war injuries, and many individuals have played significant parts in the development of war surgery, Dominique Jean Larrey is considered by many to be the first modern military surgeon. Larrey, a French battlefield surgeon and favourite of Napoleon, devised some of the first systems of triage and casualty care that still form the fundamentals of modern military medicine. These systems must be in place in order to overcome the difficulties and logistical challenges of providing medical care to a battlefield.

He who wishes to be a surgeon must first go to war. Hippocrates (c. 460–377 BC)

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