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REVIEW

PREVENTIVE MEDICINE THROUGH POETRY: *REGIMEN SANITATIS* AND PLAGUE PROPHYLAXIS IN JOHN LYDGATE'S *DIETARY* AND *A DOCTRINE FOR PESTILENCE*

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Abstract

John Lydgate's *Dietary* and *A Doctrine for Pestilence* are vernacular Middle English contributions to late medieval preventive medicine. *A Doctrine for Pestilence* is a three-stanza rhyme-royal plague poem. The *Dietary* has two variations and is broader. Most manuscripts use the ten-stanza version. Only two manuscripts have the alternate eighteen-stanza version. The two poems appeared together in eight manuscripts in the early printed *Kalender of Shepherdes*. Contemporary readers viewed them as complementing preventive books. The humoral philosophy of the non-naturals and the regimen sanitates and plague consilia are the basis of our analysis of both works. We argue that Lydgate condenses traditional preventive advice on air, diet, sleep, exercise, evacuation, and soul desires

Résumé

La médecine préventive à travers la poésie: *Regimen Sanitatis* et la prévention de la peste dans *Dietary* et *A Doctrine for Pestilence* de John Lydgate

Les ouvrages de John Lydgate intitulés *Dietary* et *A Doctrine for Pestilence* constituent des contributions en moyen anglais vernaculaire à la médecine préventive de la fin du Moyen Âge. *A Doctrine for Pestilence* est un poème sur la peste composé de trois strophes en rime royale. *Dietary* existe en deux versions et couvre un champ plus large. La plupart des manuscrits utilisent la version en dix strophes. Seuls deux manuscrits contiennent la version alternative en dix-huit strophes. Les deux poèmes sont apparus ensemble dans huit

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into a layman-friendly poetry regimen. His work is compared to English and continental plague treatises, particularly John of Burgundy's regimen. The *Doctrine* and *Dietary*'s environmental and behavioral advice reflects the period's mainstream medical thinking on plague prophylaxis, which included avoiding "infect placys", using aromatic "swote thyng[es]", a temperate diet, moderate labor, and a happy disposition. What makes the two poems different is their form and address. Lydgate turns learned preventive philosophy into memorable maxims using rhyme-royal stanzas, proverbial wording, and direct imperatives. He offers them to "al indifferent", outside of doctors and apothecaries' fees. In fifteenth-century England, these documents show how preventive regimens were spread beyond professional circles and into households.v

Keywords: John Lydgate, plague, preventive medicine, humoral theory, medical poetry.

manuscrits du *Kalender of Shepherdes*, l'un des premiers ouvrages imprimés. Les lecteurs contemporains les considéraient comme des livres de prévention complémentaires. La philosophie humorale des « non-naturels », ainsi que les conseils d'hygiène et les consilia sur la peste, constituent la base de notre analyse des deux œuvres. Nous soutenons que Lydgate condense les conseils préventifs traditionnels sur l'air, l'alimentation, le sommeil, l'exercice, l'évacuation et les désirs de l'âme en un régime poétique accessible au grand public. Son œuvre est comparée à des traités anglais et continentaux sur la peste, en particulier au régime de Jean de Bourgogne. Les conseils environnementaux et comportementaux de la *Doctrine* et du *Dietary* reflètent la pensée médicale dominante de l'époque en matière de prophylaxie de la peste, qui comprenait le fait d'éviter les « lieux infectés », d'utiliser des « choses odorantes », d'adopter un régime alimentaire tempéré, un travail modéré et une disposition joyeuse. Ce qui distingue ces deux poèmes, c'est leur forme et leur public. Lydgate transforme une philosophie préventive savante en maximes mémorables à l'aide de strophes en rime royale, d'expressions proverbiales et d'impératifs directs. Il les propose à « tous sans distinction », hors des honoraires des médecins et des apothicaires. Dans l'Angleterre du XVe siècle, ces documents montrent comment les régimes préventifs se sont diffusés au-delà des cercles professionnels pour atteindre les foyers.

Mots-clés: John Lydgate, peste, médecine préventive, théorie humorale, poésie médicale, médecine.

Introduction

In 1348, the plague known as the Black Death reached England. Over the following century it became a recurrent feature of lived experience and reshaped both medical thinking and lay practices of self-care[1-3]. Although physicians continued to operate within the Galenic humoral framework, they placed renewed emphasis on the *six non-naturals*–air and its regulation, food and drink, sleep and waking, exercise and rest, evacuation and repletion, and the passions of the soul. Together they were regarded as the foundation of both therapy and prevention[1,4,5]. Within this setting, two textual traditions offered practical instructions for living through recurrent epidemics. One was the widely circulated *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* (The Salernitan Rule of Health, a poem on the preservation of health in rhyming Latin verse), often called *Flos medicinae* (The Flower of Medicine). The other was the body of plague *consilia* (advice, a genre of book), advisory treatises produced by university masters. Both traditions taught readers to avoid corrupt air, manage diet and govern the emotions[3,6,7].

Lydgate's *A Doctrine for Pestilence* and his *Dietary* belong to this dietetic and plague tradition. They operate, however, in a different medium: short Middle English poems in regular stanzaic form, designed to be memorable and easily transmitted. *A Doctrine for Pestilence* is brief, only three rhyme-royal stanzas, and translates a plague ballade by Eustache Deschamps[8,9]. The *Dietary* is longer and far more heterogeneous. It is preserved in two distinct textual traditions that are often conflated in modern scholarship. One is the normative version, attested in almost all the fifty-nine extant manuscripts and in all surviving fragmentary versions, excerpts and early printed texts. It consists of ten eight-line stanzas. The other is the variant version, preserved in only two manuscripts but printed in MacCracken's widely cited 1934 edition[10]. It contains eight additional stanzas, mainly on the healthful consumption of food and drink[8]. Our study works primarily from the normative version, following the editorial argument of Walsh Morrissey[8], and

distinguishes its evidence from the variant version where relevant.

Although *A Doctrine for Pestilence* concerns plague specifically and the *Dietary* is a broader regimen of governance, the two poems are frequently copied together. The *Doctrine* is appended to the *Dietary* in eight manuscripts and appears in the *Kalender of Shepherdes* in fused form[8]. Olson observed that the readiness with which a plague poem could fuse with a general regimen testifies to two facts at once. One is the pervasiveness of pestilence in fifteenth-century life. The other is the wide familiarity of the prophylactic rules announced in the plague *consilia*[8, 11]. Our review takes this contemporary reading practice as its starting point. We argue that *A Doctrine for Pestilence* and the medically oriented stanzas of the *Dietary* together communicate a coherent prophylactic program structured around the *non-naturals*. Their verse form is integral to that work, helping lay readers internalize preventive habits in the face of recurrent plague.

Material and methods

This study is a narrative review of a defined corpus of late medieval medical poetry and its relevant secondary literature. Our principal primary sources are John Lydgate's *A Doctrine for Pestilence* and the normative ten-stanza version of his *Dietary*. We consulted the standard scholarly edition by Förster[12] and cross-checked it against the editions by Buhler and MacCracken[10,13]. Contextual primary material was drawn from English plague treatises and regimens collected by Horrox[14], the *Liber de diversis medicinis*(book on various medicines) edited by Ogden[15], and relevant sections of the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* in the edition discussed by Weiss Adamson[16].

Secondary literature was identified through searches conducted between January 2024 and March 2025. We searched PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR and the Wellcome Collection online catalogue. Search terms combined the primary author and works (*Lydgate*, *Dietary*, *Doctrine for Pestilence*) with terms relating to late medieval preventive medicine (*regimen sanitatis*, *non-naturals*, *plague consilia*, *medieval preventive medicine*, *Black Death*, *humoral theory*, *vernacular medicine*). No date restriction was applied, given the foundational status of classic works alongside more recent contributions. Sources were included on three grounds: (i) direct engagement with Lydgate's medical poetry (ii) substantive discussion of the *non-naturals*, the *regimen sanitatis* tradition or plague *consilia* in late medieval Europe (iii) foundational status in the history of medieval and early modern medicine. Purely literary studies without medical-historical content were excluded. When we describe Lydgate's advice as prophylactic or preventive, we do so in the sense understood by late medieval humoral medicine, not as a claim about etiological correctness in modern terms.

Historical and Medical Context

Late medieval preventive medicine rested on the Galenic-humoral model, received and elaborated through Arabic, scholastic and university medicine. Health was understood as a state of balance among the four humors and their qualities. Illness arose from imbalance produced by diet, environment, lifestyle or emotion, rather than from any extraneous pathogen in the modern sense[4,5]. At the center of this doctrine stood the six *non-naturals*: air and environment, food and drink, sleep and waking, exercise and rest, evacuation and repletion, and the passions of the soul. Their regulation was thought to preserve, or disturb, humoral balance[1,3,17]. From the thirteenth century onward, discussions of the *non-naturals* became the organizing principle for a substantial body of *regimen* literature that placed prevention at the center of medical practice.

The *regimen sanitatis* tradition offered concise handbooks on how to conduct one's life to avoid disease, frequently addressed to lay as well as professional audiences. Its best-known exemplar, the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum*, presents in verse a sequence of maxims framed as advice from the school of Salerno to an English king[5,16]. The *Tacuinum Sanitatis* (health manual), an Arabic health handbook translated into Latin, reinforced the idea that regimen was a matter of environment and social practice as much as of individual discipline[1,7]. In these works, the *non-naturals* provide both structure and content, and moderation across these domains is presented as the principal safeguard against illness.

The arrival of plague in the middle of the fourteenth century did not displace this preventive model. It intensified and redirected it. Many contemporaries initially interpreted the Black Death through apocalyptic or providential lenses. University masters and court physicians, however, soon produced numerous short treatises known as the plague *consilia*. These combined astrological speculation with concrete advice on regimen, urban management and household precaution[6,14,18]. The *consilia* urged readers to avoid corrupt air and to purify the atmosphere by fires and fumigations. Readers were further advised to avoid infected places, abstain from raw fruit, heavy meats and excess drink, moderate their sleep and exercise, and preserve a glad disposition against melancholy and sudden passion[3,14,18].

In 14th and 15th-century England, the institutional apparatus for managing plague remained less

developed than in several Italian cities. There were fewer municipal health boards and no permanent lazarettos. Both learned and lay responses nevertheless drew heavily on regimen and the *non-naturals*. English medical culture in this period was characterized by a dense interplay between university-trained physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, religious houses and household practitioners[19]. *Consilia* in Latin and academic treatises circulated alongside vernacular regimens and recipe collections[3,20]. The English plague regimen attributed to John of Burgundy, dated to around 1365, is representative. In the passage translated by Horrox, it advises:

> In cold or rainy weather, you should light fires in your chamber ... and in foggy or windy weather you should inhale aromatics every morning before leaving home: ambergris, musk, rosemary and similar things if you are rich; zedoary, cloves, nutmeg, mace, and similar things if you are poor ... and carry in the hand a ball of ambergris or other suitable aromatic. Later, on going to bed, shut the windows and burn juniper branches so that the smoke and scent fills the room ... And do this as often as a foetid or bad odour can be detected in the air, and especially when the weather is foggy or the air tainted, and it can protect against the epidemic[14].

This regimen does not invoke microbial theory, which lay several centuries in the future. Its logic is humoral and environmental. Corrupt air disturbs the balance of humors, while aromatic fumigation corrects the atmosphere. Comparable directives appear in the plague tract of Henry Daniel, in local household compilations such as the *Liber de diversis medicinis*(Book on Various Medicines) copied by Robert Thornton, and in a wide range of 15th-century English regimens[14, 15, 21]. Preventive medicine in this period was therefore doctrinally humoral and practically domestic. It depended on patterns of life that could be taught, memorized and enacted by lay people within their own households.

Texts, Audience and Genre

Among Middle English texts in verse, the *Dietary* is one of the most frequently copied, surviving in fifty-nine manuscripts. It also circulated widely in print as a verse coda to the prose *Gouernayl of Helþe* (Journal of Health) din Caxton's edition of 1490, in reprints by Wynkyn de Worde (1506, 1530), and in the almanac *Kalender of Shepherdes* from 1506 until the mid-seventeenth century[8]. After the *Dietary*, the second and third most frequently copied medical poems in English survive in only twenty-nine and twenty-three manuscripts respectively[8].

Two textual traditions of the *Dietary* must be distinguished. The normative version, attested in nearly every complete copy, consists of ten eight-line stanzas in Monk's Tale stanza, rhyming ababbcbc (poems and songs have rhyme schemes at the end of each line; letters are used to identify which lines rhyme; lines with the same letter rhyme).The variant version is preserved in only two manuscripts (British Library, Lansdowne MS 699 and Leiden University Library, MS Vossius Germ. Gall. Q.9). It contains eight additional stanzas, chiefly concerning the healthful consumption of food and drink[8]. Several of the most frequently quoted medical passages belong to the variant additions rather than to the normative text. One example is the formulation of three "lechees" (a glad heart, a temperate diet and freedom from anxious thought), often taken as the poem's emblematic statement of preventive doctrine[8].

A Doctrine for Pestilence is a brief text of three rhyme-royal stanzas. It translates a ballade against plague by Eustache Deschamps that survives in a codex produced by John Shirley, the great promoter of Lydgate's works[8]. Unlike the *Dietary*, the *Doctrine* does not survive independently. It is appended to the *Dietary* in eight manuscripts, including the two that contain the variant version, and is fused with the *Dietary* in the *Kalender of Shepherdes*. The normative *Dietary* itself refers to plague only once, in a couplet on daily fire-making: "Fyre at morow and toward bedde at eue/ Ayenst mystys blake and eyres of pestilence" [Have a fire in the morning and towards bed at evening, against black mists and air infected with plague][11]. Yet its frequent pairing with the *Doctrine* made it function, in the reception history, as part of a combined preventive text.

Rubrics attached to copies of the *Dietary* show that contemporaries recognised it as a medical work despite its wide-ranging subject matter. Titles such as *Dietarium*, *Dietarium salutis*, *Dietarium salutissimum*, "A dietarie for the body", and Caxton's *Medicina stomachi* place it in the *regimen sanitatis* tradition[8]. A second group of titles uses the broader term *gouernaunce*, Lydgate's translation of the Latin *regimen*. Examples include "The gouernans of man", "the gouernyng as well-off body as off sowle", and, in the *Kalender of Shepherdes*, "the gouernance of health"[8]. Manuscript associations reinforce this medical categorisation. The *Dietary* occurs in physicians' compendia such as Bethesda, National Library of Medicine, MS Schullian 514, which contains a translation of John of Burgundy's plague regimen, medical recipes and uroscopy treatises[8,22]. It also appears in medical manuscripts intended for lay use. One example is Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 261, which gathers regimens and recipes against plague prepared

around 1500 for Lady Margaret Beaufort. The unique complete witness of the Latin source of the *Dietary*, an anonymous *Dietarium*, is preserved in British Library, Sloane MS 3534[8].

Lydgate writes within a medical tradition, but he does not write for the professional medical environment that produced Latin *consilia* and university regimens. The final stanza of the normative *Dietary* makes this explicit:

> Thus, in two thynges standith al the welth
> Of sowle and body, who so lust to sewe:
> Moderat foode gevith to man his helth,
> And al surfetis doth from hym remeve;
> And charite to the sowle is dewe.
> This ressayt is bought of no poticarye,
> Of mayster Antony nor of maister Hewe;
> To al indifferent, richest diatorye [8].

These lines contrast the poem with fee-based medical practice. Two celebrity physicians are named, plausibly Antonio Cermisone (d. 1441) and Hugh of Siena (Ugo Benzi, d. 1439), only to be rejected in favor of a more accessible model of preventive advice[8]. Lydgate offers his "ressayt" to "al indifferent," that is, to all readers without distinction of means or rank. This language resonates with a wider clerical tradition of disseminating medical knowledge freely, represented by works such as Peter of Spain's *Thesaurus pauperum* and Henry Daniel's English *Liber uricrisiarum*[8,19]. Combined with the poem's simple lexis, regular stanzaic form and gnomic, easily quotable maxims, this address suggests a primary audience of semi-literate householders, parish clergy and lay readers seeking practical guidance on daily conduct and health, rather than university physicians.

Mapping the Non-Naturals onto Lydgate's Verse

When read alongside university medicine and *regimen sanitatis* literature's typical taxonomy of non-naturals, the *Doctrine* and medically oriented *Dietary* maps directly onto it[1,4,5]. The poems do not show abstract physiology. They condense humoral theory's practical applications into rules. All these work together to fight disease, especially plague.

Air, environment and aromatics

Plague *consilia* prioritizes impure air in prophylactic measures. Doctors advised avoiding infected places, stagnant air, and noxious vapours or counteracting them with fires and aromatics[3,6,14]. The opening stanza of *A Doctrine for Pestilence* condenses this environmental program into one rhyme-royal unit:

> Who will been holle & keep hym from sekenesse
> And resiste the strok of pestilence,
> Lat hym be glad, & voide al hevynesse,
> Flee wikkyd heires, eschew the presence
> Off infect placys, causyng the violence;
> Drynk good wyn, & holsom meetis take,
> Smelle swote thyng[es] & for his deffence
> Walk in cleene heir, eschew[e] mystis blake [11, Doctrine, ll. 1-8].

Here, every imperative matches learned plague literature. "Flee wikkyd heires" and "eschew the presence/ Off infect placys" support the consiliar order to avoid corrupt and pestilential environments[3,6,14]. "Smelle swote thyng[es]" and "Walk in cleene heir, eschew mystis blake" resemble Latin and vernacular plague tracts. Those advised using pleasant, hot, and dry odors like rosemary, juniper, and frankincense to protect the heart from venomous air[3,14,16]. The detailed prescription from John of Burgundy in Section 3 for ambergris, musk, rosemary, juniper branches, frankincense, labdanum, storax, and calamintha is similar[14]. Lydgate's verse replicates the environmental component of contemporary plague prophylaxis in a form designed for memorization[8, 21]. His normative *Dietary* mentions a morning and evening domestic fire "Ayenst mystys blake and eyres of pestilence"[11]. This couplet echoes the plague *consilia's* order to purify indoor air by burning aromatic branches[3,14] and shows how plague prophylaxis vocabulary can appear briefly but clearly in a general health regimen[8,10].

Diet, sleep, exercise and evacuation

Dietary advice in poems reflects *regimental* and *consiliary* writing consensus. Medical experts advised against raw products, gross meat products, and excess food or wine. These were believed to produce unnecessary humors and hinder digestion, predisposing the body to putrefaction during epidemics[3,16,23]. An eight-line stanza summarizes the normative *Dietary's* dietetic teaching:

> For helth of body, kover from cold thyne hede;
> Ete no rawe mete; take gode hede therto;
> Drynk holsom wyne; fede þe on lyght brede;
> With thyne appetite ryse from thy dyner also;
> With women aged fleschely haue not a do;
> Vppon thy slepe drynke not of the kuppe;
> Gladde toward bedde, at morow both two;
> And vse neuer late for to suppe[11].

"For helth of body" translates Sloane MS 3534's Latin *Dietarium's* formulaic opening clause. *Secretum Secretorum* and *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* have analogs. The *Doctrine* adds "Drynk good wyn, & holsom meetis take"[11]. Black bile and melancholy were associated with red and heavy meats, while poultry was light and easily digested[16, 23]. Wine was

considered medicinal in Latin and vernacular regimens[16, 23]. "Vinum subtile creat in sene cor iuuenile" ("Fine wine makes the heart young in the old") is in the *Flos medicinae* and copied on the same folio as the *Dietary*'s final stanza in Sloane MS 3534[8].

The *Dietary* advises against late dinners and drinking. It advises "vse neuer late for to suppe"[11]. A full stomach before bedtime generates excess phlegm and adjusts humors, disrupting digestion and predisposing the body to disease[1,14,23]. Another closely regulated *non-natural* is sleep, waking, exercise, and rest. Doctors advised against daytime sleep, especially after meals, violent exertion, and inactivity. Both impeded humor preparation and evacuation[1,5,16]. The *Dietary* advises against drinking "Vppon thy slepe" and staying "Gladde toward bedde, at morow both two"[11]. The *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* incorporates the maxim "somnum fuge meridianum" (flee meridian sleep), which was popular in English regimen literature[8,16]. Exercise is moderate. As the *Doctrine* concludes, "Walk in cleene heir, eschew[e] mystis blake," it combines air and movement, reflecting Latin regimens' *moderata exercitatio*[1,5,16].

Lydgate indirectly mentions evacuation and replacement. His repeated emphasis on temperate diet implies both. According to humoral doctrine, overfilling the body without timely evacuation produced corrupt humours that could putrefy under pestilence, while excessive bleeding or purging could weaken vital powers[4,7,16]. The normative *Dietary* concludes: "Moderat foode gevith to man his helth,/ And al surfetis doth from hym remeve"[8]. Others handle phlebotomy and pharmacological purging, but Lydgate does not. Moderation against "surfetis" matches the *non-naturals*' preventive logic[1,21].

The passions of the soul

Lydgate's verse most closely matches contemporary humoral theory in its treatment of the emotions. Scholastic physicians called joy, sadness, anger, and fear *accidentia animae*. These could affect heat, moisture, and heart function, causing or preventing disease[1,3,5]. Plague consilia advised joy and cautioned against fear and melancholy. Both supposedly bred pestilential corruption[6,14,18]. The *Doctrine* says that to "resiste the strok of pestilence" one must "be glad, & voide al hevynesse"[11]. In its second stanza, the *Dietary* offers a portable equanimity and contentment regimen for situations without medical care:

> Yff so be that leches don the faile,
> Than take hede to vse thynges thre:
> Moderate diet; moderat trauayle;
> Not malicious for non aduersite.
> Meke in troubull, gladde in poverte,
> Ryche with lityll, content with suffisaunce,
> Neuer grucchyng, myry like thy degre.
> Yff phisik lakke, make þis þi gouernaunce [11, ll. 9-16].

In the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum*, the three "physicians" are "Si tibi deficiant medici, medici tibi fiant / Haec tria: mens laeta, requies, moderata diaeta" (If you lack physicians, let these three be your physicians: a happy mind, rest and a moderate diet). The English version says to "take hede to vse thynges thre" without a doctor[8,16]. Three "physicians" in the *Salernitan* passage represent three *non-naturals*: emotions or *accidentia animae* (mens laeta), rest and exertion (requies), and popular diet (dieta)[8]. English stanza by Lydgate follows this structure. It acknowledges that university-trained physicians were scarce, especially outside large cities[14,19,24]. Lydgate recommends *gouernaunce*, a spiritual and physiological practice of temperance, equanimity, and contentment, for such situations. His moderation (temperate, meke, content, suffisaunce) defines a humoral ideal in which passions and humors balance[1,3].

Overall, the *Doctrine* and medically oriented *Dietary* stanzas are not just commonplaces. They translate late medieval preventive medicine's six *non-naturals* into Middle English verse. Air and environment, diet and drink, sleep and exercise, repletion and evacuation, and soul passions are each given proportional attention for plague resistance[14,18]. Thus, the poems are a vernacular digest of current prophylactic thinking in medical history. They are based on Latin regimens and *consilia* but recontextualized for lay audiences[8,20,21].

Poetry as Preventive Medicine

Lydgate's poetry matches modern humoral medicine and plague *consilia*. They distinguish themselves by writing in tightly structured vernacular verse. Regular meter rhyme-royal stanzas divide advice into air, diet, sleep, conduct, and emotion. This is mnemonic didactic verse, according to medieval science historians. Early and modern medical poems, like the Latin *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* and Avicenna's *Urjūzah fī al-ṭibb* (Medical Poem), use similar strategies. Both summarize lengthy doctrines for memorization and recitation[5,16,25]. The three-stanza *Doctrine for Pestilence* summarizes plague prophylaxis' environmental and behavioral components. Also concise is the normative *Dietary*. Both choices emphasize portability over comprehensiveness[8]. Stanzas usually focus on one non-natural or a closely related cluster, and lines end with maxim-like rules. Rhyme and parallelism help readers remember the lines and internalize a sequence of preventive precepts without a book[8,16].

Late medieval physicians considered *passiones animae* medically significant. Lydgate's verse most

closely matches contemporary humoral theory in its treatment of the emotions[1,3]. Plague treatises advised patients and healthy people to be cheerful, avoid solitude and grief, and seek moderate recreation to combat epidemic fear[6,7,18]. Many Latin regimens include brief psychosomatic notes. This motif dominates Lydgate's verse. The normative *Dietary* emphasizes being "myry like thy degree" and content "with suffisaunce"[11]. This emphasis is moral and theological, such as gladness versus heaviness or charity versus envy or conflict. Medical logic matches modern humoral theory. Lydgate grounds medical advice in a moral universe familiar to his audience by weaving scriptural allusion and monastic moderation into it. Thus, he boosts compliance. Fear of death, salvation, and social status arise alongside fear of physical illness. Avoiding excess, being happy, and making peace with neighbors are spiritual disciplines and epidemic disease prevention[3,21].

University masters and court physicians wrote plague *consilia* as formal responses to authorities. These technical Latin works assumed a professional or elite audience[6,14]. Lydgate separates his "ressayt" from business and profession. "Bought of no poticarye,/ Of mayster Antony nor of maister Hewe" he says, offering it to "al indifferent"[8]. He follows a clerical and monastic tradition of freely sharing medical knowledge, such as Peter of Spain's *Thesaurus pauperum* and Henry Daniel's English *Liber uricrisiarum*[8,19]. Lydgate addresses the reader's daily decisions in imperative mode. Without astrological conjunctions, complex pathophysiology, or scholarly dispute, he writes "Ete no rawe mete", "Walk in cleene heir", and "Drynk good wyn". His authority comes from monastic wisdom, proverbs, and medical experience. To govern rather than prescribe, he shares it. Thus, the poems parallel plague treatises in vernacular. They register and format regimen-centered learned advice for household implementation[3, 20, 21].

Implications for Preventive Medicine

Read against the background of late medieval humoral theory, *regimen sanitatis* literature and plague *consilia*, *A Doctrine for Pestilence* and the normative *Dietary* emerge as compact vernacular expressions of contemporary preventive doctrine. Both poems show that the core elements of prophylaxis were not confined to academic medicine, civic ordinance or Latin tract. These elements include the management of air and environment, the regulation of diet and drink, the control of sleep and exercise, the avoidance of conflict and the deliberate cultivation of a glad heart. Lydgate's poems translate them into forms usable within lay households. The texts thus serve as valuable primary sources for understanding how preventive regimens circulated and were framed in fifteenth-century England, and how medical counsel was communicated beyond professional circles during recurrent plague waves.

These texts also testify to continuity in the reliance on humoral explanations and the *non-naturals*. They exemplify, at the same time, the shift emphasized in recent scholarship from speculative etiologies towards practical regimens aimed at avoiding or mitigating disease[6,18,26]. They draw attention to communication strategy as a constitutive part of preventive medicine. Lydgate recasts standard prophylactic counsel into short, memorable English stanzas, binds it to moral exhortation and offers it to "al indifferent" outside the commercial sphere. His example shows that the effectiveness of preventive measures depends on more than theoretical soundness. How preventive counsel is framed and transmitted matters as much as its theoretical content[3,8,18]. Two limitations should be noted. First, this review concentrates on the normative text of the *Dietary* and does not attempt a systematic analysis of the variant version, which would require a separate study of its manuscript tradition. Second, the focus on Lydgate excludes the wider corpus of contemporaneous Middle English medical verse and prose. Further comparative work would help situate his contribution more precisely within the broader vernacularization of preventive medicine.

Conclusions

A Doctrine for Pestilence and the prescriptive *Dietary* of John Lydgate are vernacular adaptations of late medieval preventive medicine. They are constructed on the basis of the *six non-naturals* and are more than simply didactic or moralizing poems. Their medical content is very similar to the preventative logic expressed in Latin *regimina sanitatis* and plague *consilia*. This is especially true in the management of the environment, the moderation of diet, the regulation of sleep and exercise, and the control of emotional states. What distinguishes these texts is the way in which they are transmitted. Lydgate rewrites familiar medical advice into short Middle English verses, turning preventive medicine into a mnemonic and performative practice available to non-specialist audiences. Lydgate's work is part of a larger trend of vernacularization by which medical information was transferred from universities to households, devotional settings, and everyday practice. The regulation of the passions of the soul, offered at once as ethical discipline and as somatic prophylaxis, exemplifies a vision of health in which emotional, social, and physiological balance are seen as interrelated. It regards preventative medicine as more than a body

of knowledge. It is also a communicative practice in which form, language and audience shape the reception of medical advice during recurrent epidemics.

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