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Showcasing The History Of Medicine

Remarkable progress has been made in the evolution of medicine in the past 100 years. One manifestation has been an increase in the life expectancy at birth from approximately 40 years to 80 years in most higher income countries. Yet appreciation of these developments has been limited for most of our population. Even established benefits such as vaccination now have influential critics. In general, the medical and allied health professions have baulked at promoting health care in the public arena, perhaps because of potential criticism or the perception of a lack of public interest. Methods for the promotion of history include books, lectures, videos, films, museums, online [virtual] museums and special exhibitions. Most books, lectures and videos have a limited audience unless they are featured on television. There are few films on the history of medicine. Most medical museums are small and largely cater for medical students and local medical staff. Internationally, there are a small number of larger museums that are open to the public on most days. The author has visited five of these museums in Europe and North America and reflects on the quality of the collections and the possibility of establishing a national museum in Australia. While the emphasis of these collections varies, the Wellcome Collection at the Science Museum, London, contains the best educational, interactive and visually attractive collection. However, the financial viability of these museums remains unclear as most are sponsored by government or professional societies. At present, the impact of virtual [online] museums remains unclear. The way forward maybe special exhibitions of high quality that could be attractive to established museums in more than one state. Exhibition topics could

include “Understanding human genetics”, “Healthy aging”, and “Obesity- what’s the problem?”.