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Medicine in the Colonies: Searching for the emergence of local cultures of medicine in the nineteenth century Australian colonies through digital analysis of medical journals, 1856-1900

The development of scientific medicine and medical practice in colonial Australia is inextricably bound to that of the British. For much of the nineteenth century, the majority of medical practitioners practicing in the Australian colonies earned their qualifications at medical schools in Britain, despite the foundation of local medical schools in the middle of the century. It was not until the 1880s that sizable numbers of colonially trained medical practitioners began to practice (and conduct research) across the Australian continent. This paper seeks to examine the colonial contribution to the wider field of medical knowledge through a comparison of medical journals from both Britain and from several Australian colonies. By using the distant reading techniques of the digital humanities, in conjunction with the traditional close reading of historical research, this paper examines the comparative histories of these journals over the second half of the nineteenth century. Through doing so it will explore the interconnections and differences between the texts within the journals themselves, and the communities that read them. By comparing the British Medical Journal with the Victorian Australian Medical Journal, the South Australian Transactions of the South Australian Branch of the British Medical Association, and the New South Wales Medical Gazette this paper sets out to examine the way that new medical knowledge is produced and disseminated in the colonial setting, and to examine if and how the writings of colonial practitioners differed from each other and from their peers in Britain.