

Tennessee Board of Medical Examiners Tennessee Board of Osteopathic Examination



Stretching 440 miles from North Carolina in the east to Arkansas in the west, Tennessee was settled in stages from east to west over many decades as the threat from Indians diminished. The first physicians settled in Sullivan County in the Appalachian Mountains after the American Revolution. As settlers migrated west, physicians followed – first to the Cumberland settlement, now known as Nashville, and then to Memphis during the 1830s. At the time, physician training largely consisted of apprenticeships to established physicians in a community followed by a relatively short course of more formal medical studies. Many early physicians in Tennessee studied at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky.

Many untrained individuals also practiced medicine, especially on family members. Medicinal plants native to Tennessee were commonly used, as were drugs imported from Europe such as mercury and opium that were sold in mercantile stores. In the early 1800s, a number of medical sects had emerged and gained popularity. In response, trained physicians organized to defend their profession, forming the Medical Society of Tennessee in May 1830. The society had the power to license practicing physicians but rarely did so, largely due to the state's considerable geographic area and the outbreak of the Civil War. As a result, trained physicians remained a minority among the practicing physicians in Tennessee until licensing procedures became law in 1889.

The outbreak of cholera and yellow fever in the late 1800s created a sense of urgency behind efforts to regulate the practice of medicine and improve public health. Steamship travel along the Mississippi River facilitated the spread of cholera, yellow fever and small pox. The legislature passed laws in 1877 and 1878 to establish a state Board of Health with the power to quarantine and regulate sanitation in hospitals. In 10 years, the mortality rate in Memphis dropped by half.

In 1901, the Tennessee legislature passed a law creating the [Board of Medical Examiners](#), which was given the responsibility of ensuring those who practice medicine and surgery are qualified. Four years later, the [Board of Osteopathic Examination](#) was created to regulate the practice of osteopathy. Both agencies serve as advisory boards to the state Department of Health.

Source: Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Medicine, Jane Crumpler DeFiore, University of Tennessee: <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=882>