Hippocrates, son of Heraclides, was born in 460 BC on the island of Kos (Greek island in the Aegean Sea), and died in 370 BC. He belonged to the guild of physicians called Asclepiadæ, and his teachers were Herodicus and his father. Hippocrates taught in Greece, Persia, and Egypt. Hippocrates was not only a medical genius, but also a person who, in his passage through the world, shed a light that has shone through history.

In the first days of mankind, medicine was only religion, superstition, and magic. In his teachings, Hippocrates tried to separate the beliefs of the past. Within his works are philosophy and technical handbooks, but no superstition. Others show signs of a great mind, dignified and reserved with all of the severity of the “golden” century of Pericles, which, without being distinctively original, transformed the best tendencies in Greek medicine into something that has since been admired by doctors and scientists.

Hippocrates believed diseases follow a natural course, which physicians must understand thoroughly to predict the favorable or fatal outcome. He believed diseases are caused by disturbances in the composition of the constituents of the body and that nature tries to bring these irregularities to a normal status. However, “critical” days exist when the battle between nature and disease reaches a crisis. Defeat of the nature means that the patient will die. Therefore, all physicians can do for their patients is give nature a chance to win.¹

Hippocrates stamped his genius on the double nature of medicine—surgery and pathology. During his time, surgery consisted of wound healing and limb setting. The influence of his mind is in pathology, where for the first time in the history of human thought, was combined with the philosophical search into cause and effect. The problem of the irrational and the logical, of the human and divine, of observation and conclusion, which Socrates experienced in the ethical field, was faced by the Koan physician in medicine. His observations and the accuracy of his thoughts and expressions were applied to the diagnosis and prognosis of diseases.

In the treatise On Joints, one of the most important surgical texts of the Hippocratic Collection,² Hippocrates details his experience not only on diagnosing injuries, but also their prognosis and treatment. On The Spine provides the reader with numerous observa-
Hippocrates, the function of the spine is to maintain the erect position of man and to form the shape of the human body.

The tremendous changes in science and technology provided physicians with information regarding the detailed anatomy and biomechanical behavior of the normal spine, which helped not only to understand the pathologic spine, but also its management.

In the second instance, many notions of today’s practice were approached by Hippocrates (without the help of modern technology). The notion of fracture-dislocation producing complete paralysis (narcosis) as Hippocrates observed could have resulted from displaced vertebra or bony fragments following injury to the spinal cord. Reduction of such an injury is difficult, and the potential for spinal cord injury when the latter is not initially injured leads to poor results. Hippocrates advocated open reduction of a fracture-dislocation, which was easy to perform in corpses, but not in live patients, proving that the results of such an operation could be catastrophic for patients.

A spinal cord lesion due to a compressed, and not always transected, spinal cord can resolve spontaneously. Hippocrates described spinal shock or an incomplete lesion, which could resolve if the nutrition of the spinal cord was preserved or restored.

REFERENCES