During the content of the war the medical aspect became far larger than anyone would expect it to. From the slightest form of a cold to a small wound infection, everything became deadly due to the lack of knowledge and material used to treat the soldiers. As war progressed on so did the numbers of dead bodies on the battle field, but who would think that one of the biggest fights would become one that was fought without preparation? This battle enemy became known as disease. Without fair warning this nemesis seem to be unbeatable and the only way to accept it was to deal with the simple fact that there was a high percentage chance that death would overcome you if you seem the slightest of illness or a wound. This became one of the major problems during the war because on average there were far more deaths due to sickness or improper treatment then humans dying on the battle field. This outbreak of infection and improper treatment from the medical departments seem to play a deeper role then one would expect. Why did this problem become one that would affect the war the most? Did the revolution of medicine evolve at the rate it did because of the poor economy or was it result from a lack of knowledge?

During this time in history many things including tools used to treat patients were filthy and crawling with infection.

According to Pacer’s research, “Sanitation also became increasingly important and promoting healthy living conditions was a material goal of both Confederate and Union medical services. Medical knowledge about the connection between
sanitation and general health was sketchy, however, so camps and even hospitals were often unclean and correspondingly unhealthy” (Pacer).

Small things such as clean water seem to play a very disturbing role in numerous amounts of cases. Even something small as changing and supplying water could make the biggest difference considering the medical aspect. Doctors and nurses at this time uneducated on health hazards caused many of the causality because of their own lack of cleanliness. Hopping from surgery to surgery nurses and doctors used tools on patients that were soaking in infection literally. Without a plentiful supply of fresh water doctors and nurses typically cleaned their utensils in the same bloody water that they had used in previous operations. Another major cause of infection that was because of the lack of fresh water and also knowledge was resulting in non-surgical infections leaving common colds deadly. This major cause was known as insufficient washing of the hands. Most doctors didn’t comprehend the need to wash their hand to prevent infections which helped rally up the body count. Let’s assume that the doctors and nurses realize that washing their hands and medical instruments could help prevent further infection; this still wouldn’t help effectively eliminate unnecessary infect because of the poor conditions of the hospitals.

So how much money was spent on improving living conditions and helping medicine evolve to what it is today? Political leaders from both sides didn’t seem to value to concept of keeping their troops healthy instead they spend countless amounts of money on war equipment such as gun and bullets. At the begging of the war political leaders had no intentions of the war lasting as long as it did, using this
reason to not establish medical facilities for the troops became bigger as the war prolong. If they were to prepare properly for the war pertaining setting up medical establishments, would there have been less causality due to disease? After the Battle of Bull Run, casualties piled up along with the wounded, but alone the wounded calculated to be a total of 2,894 between both Confederates and Union troops. This battle finally woke up the U.S. government that began to take headquarters in several hospitals around the country. Already unprepared political parties and the leaders of both sides of the war thought that would be enough for the short battle to come. With this mindset the government didn’t see the uses in providing money and resources for the medical society and the need of physicians. Finally after thousands of dead from wounded leaders of both sides thought that enlisting nurses, surgeons, and doctors to travel on their road of blood shed would help lower the risk of death.

The first medical director of the army that was appointed by McClellan under the Army of the Potomac was surgeon Charles S. Tripler. Soon after his enlistment he became ambitious to put together a plan that could help advance medical procedures.

Look at Phalen’s studies he states that, “The experience of all armies convinces me of the fact that the sick do much better in regimental than in general hospitals, the latter being nuisances to be tolerated only because there are occasions when they are absolutely necessary, as, for instance, when the army is put in motion and cannot transport its sick.”

During the Civil War there were two types of hospitals known as your field hospital and a general hospital. Your typical field hospital was a portable hospital
that was usually set up near the battle fields. These set ups were usually made out of nearby churches, portable tents and civilian homes. Using the ideas of field hospitals were very unsanitary to add on to the fact that doctors understood nothing about the importance of cleanliness this became a main breeding ground for bacteria and infection. “Not much was known at the time about the need to sterilize equipment, change lines and keep the hospital clean to minimize the chance of diseases lingering within its walls and spreading to others” (Tax). With the lack of material provided by the state doctors and nurses in these field hospitals made way with what source they had around them such as; the property owner’s beds, linens, and tables to improvised for the sick and wounded spinning in and out of the battle field. Using these field houses also provided a hazard for the civilian property because once the war passed by and there the soldiers vacant their property civilians returned to their home only to walk into a nest of bacteria.

On the other hand general hospitals were large main hospitals that were located on the base of the Confederates and Unions. These hospitals were in place for the seriously wounded or ill soldiers. When soldiers were injured on the battle field and were looked at by the field house doctors there were examined to see if it was worth or would make it to the general hospital back on base. After determining their faith those that we choose to go to the general hospitals were load onto railroad freight cars. In these railroad freights lied layers of straw that the wound and ill would lay on for days at a time until arrive on base. These locomotives were also in horrible conditions and most soldiers died during the ride the general hospitals. Once reaching the general hospitals there was no promise of lie duded to the fact that
most general hospitals were worst then the field houses. With lack of money to supply incoming soldiers with clean linings, water, food, and clothes most soldiers died from infections from pervious patients.

“Satterlee U.S.A. General Hospital in Philadelphia, PA was one of the largest hospitals on the Union side. It was a series of tents that covered 16 acres of ground and had 4,500 beds. Over the course of the war, they treated close to 12,000 soldiers with only 260 deaths. This was an amazing feat at the time where unsanitary conditions in Civil War hospitals were the norm” (Tax).

Majority amounts of money and support for the hospitals for the troops and medical facilities came from civilians. Back at home many communities raised money through churches and organizations to help supply medical needs, food, and clothing for their loved ones. Enlisted through the medical director Dr. Charles S. Tripler, doctors and nurses came from all over to help take care of the falling troops. With the lack of supply from the government most of these caretakers brought their own supply of medical instruments.

Billings he writes about a doctor at war; “I began service, and had three things with me that none of the other surgeons had: A set of clinical thermometers like those Dr. Keen talked about, a straight one and one with a curve; a hypodermic syringe, and a Symes staff for urethral stricturotomy. The hypodermic syringe was in constant requisition. The clinical thermometer was troublesome and was not very useful”
In Billings letter he also writes about how the Sisters of Charity a women’s group at the time helped take charging of the nursing side of the war. Nurses at the time were just as import as the doctors operating. Providing special support and comfort the nurse help keep wounded soldier spirits up no matter their condition. Away from home and not far from death this helped keep many troops from depression. Listening to their problems, bathing them, feeding them, and writing notes for the unfortunate played a big emotional role. Clara Barton a recording clerk in the U.S. Patent Office dove into the action of the war tending the personal needs of the falling men. Helping with the field hospital Clara faced death everyday duded to the flying bullets above with no attending target striking men in the head as she tended to them. Still she knew what she was there for and never gave into the brutality around even though she received a “whopping” twelve dollars every pay check from a government that really could care less if you perished off the earth. No matter what Clara made it work, nursing men in uniform to health with a limited supply of materials almost became impossible but, “Clara Barton provided clothing and assorted foods and supplies to the sick and wounded soldiers on behalf of such organizations as the U.S, Sanitary Commission, although she never formally affiliated with any agency or group”(Clara).

The U.S Sanitary Commission created on June 18, 1861, by the government was in order to help support the medical aspects of the war. This supporting staff of the war was originally located in the north and was ran by volunteers all of the commissions money was raised by these volunteers without the help of the government. Providing all they had for the soldiers no one could really complain for
the deficiency of goods and materials need for the troops. Gaining the attention of most with their outstanding humanitarian work the government still provided no contribution for the development of medicine for their people. I feel like the government gave us the “U.S Commission Office” to shut up cries of the fallen soldier’s loved one that continue to ask questions about the death of their dad, brother, or husband.

Where did the money from the government go? As we the people die for their fancy wigs and proper hand jesters to the crowd. You aspect your people to fight for your purpose and to stand behind you whether your right or wrong, but you can’t provide clean water or food for them to survive.

Saving money, the government used ransacking to supply their troop with what was needed because of the poor economy. During the war Confederate Congress enlisted army agents to do whatever the government wanted them to do for instance taking things by force. “In March 1863 the confederate Congress essentially legalized this practice by passing the Impressment Act, which permitted material supplies and agricultural products to be seized, as long as a “fair” price was paid, to be determined by a system of arbitration.” Still the question ascends, where did the money from the government go during the war? If they didn’t feed the troops, provide medical need, clothing, or suitable living conditions how the economy could be that bad. During the month of April in 1862, Congress announced their first taxes on the citizens of the United States these taxes were put on business, work income, and property that cause provides to place taxes on everyday goods.
For the Confederates financing during the war the civilians that were residences of the south had a daintier tax burden compared to the Union. Using this tactic hurt the confederates in the long run because they only generated $3.5 million within the four years hurting their ability to produce anything during the war. On the other hand the Union established a Treasury and tariff arrangement. Bringing in millions of dollars from the Union stand point they had no excuse for poor treatment of their men in uniform. Taking care of the men fights for you cause would have been key idea dude to the fact their paying with their lives.

Sadly during this period of history medicine would not evolve at all, but became a stepping stone for medical theories to come. When the last gun was finally fired the medical side of the war had finally just begun. Learning more than ever doctors and nurses to the as a learning method for sickness and illness to come. After the war ending many medical situation that they dealt with on the battle field followed the soldiers back to their hometowns sometime infecting their city. Between poor uses of stargazing money income for war the U.S as who suffered from the lack of preparation of the government. Comparing to today’s day and age our government provide over billions of dollars in healthcare alone. They have learned that the health of the troop is just as important of the war itself.
Work Cited


