



The Healer's Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England

Rebecca J. Tannenbaum

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This book, the first to describe women medical practitioners other than midwives in the colonial period, emphasizes that medical care was part of every woman's work. Using memorable anecdotes, engaging characters, and medical oddities, *The Healer's Calling* tells the fascinating story of the practice of household medicine in early America.

Rebecca J. Tannenbaum points out that housewives provided much of the medical care available in the seventeenth century. Elite women cared for the indigent in their towns and used medical practice to make influential connections with powerful men; "doctresses" or "doctor women" supported themselves with their practices and competed directly with male physicians; and midwives were crucial "expert witnesses" in cases of fornication, murder, and witchcraft. Yet there were limits to the authority of women's healing communities, with consequences for those who overstepped the bounds.

By setting women's practice in the context of contemporary medicine, gender roles, and community norms, Tannenbaum also reveals the relationship between women's medical practice and witchcraft accusations. Tannenbaum examines colonial America's full range of medical options—including the work of classically trained male doctors and male lay practitioners—with a keen eye to the interactions and tensions between men and women in the realm of healing.

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