



Summary of the mental health conditions and recommended treatments associated with the four humours

Information:

Tyson, P., Khanam Davies, S., & Torn, A.
(2020) Madness: History, Concepts and
Controversies. Oxon: Routledge

Humour: Black Bile

- Property: Cold and Dry
- Mental Health Effects: Hippocrates said that too much black bile would result in melancholia which is known today as depression. Symptoms would be loss of appetite, irritability, restlessness and an inability to speak
- Hot black bile had the potential to cause cheerfulness or in extreme cases manic states,
- Whilst cold black bile might cause contrasting symptoms, withdrawal and fearfulness



BLACK BILE

Melancholic Temperament

Humour: Black Bile

- Treatment: Hellebore was administered in order to cause the patient to have diarrhoea and vomiting which was thought to purge their intestines of excess black bile.
- Bloodletting would also be used to remove black bile thought present in the bloodstream
- Also: keeping the patient in a warm environment, giving them hot baths and feeding them non-dry and hot foods such as soup or moist meat and fish.



Humour: Yellow Bile

- Property: Hot and Dry
- Hippocrates suggested that an excess of Yellow Bile would cause an extreme choleric temperament where the individual would be agitated, easily angered and often in conflict with others. The state is like mania. Hippocrates also suggested that when Yellow Bile travels to the brain it causes the brain to overheat and this results in severe anxiety symptoms which Hippocrates called 'terrors and fears'.



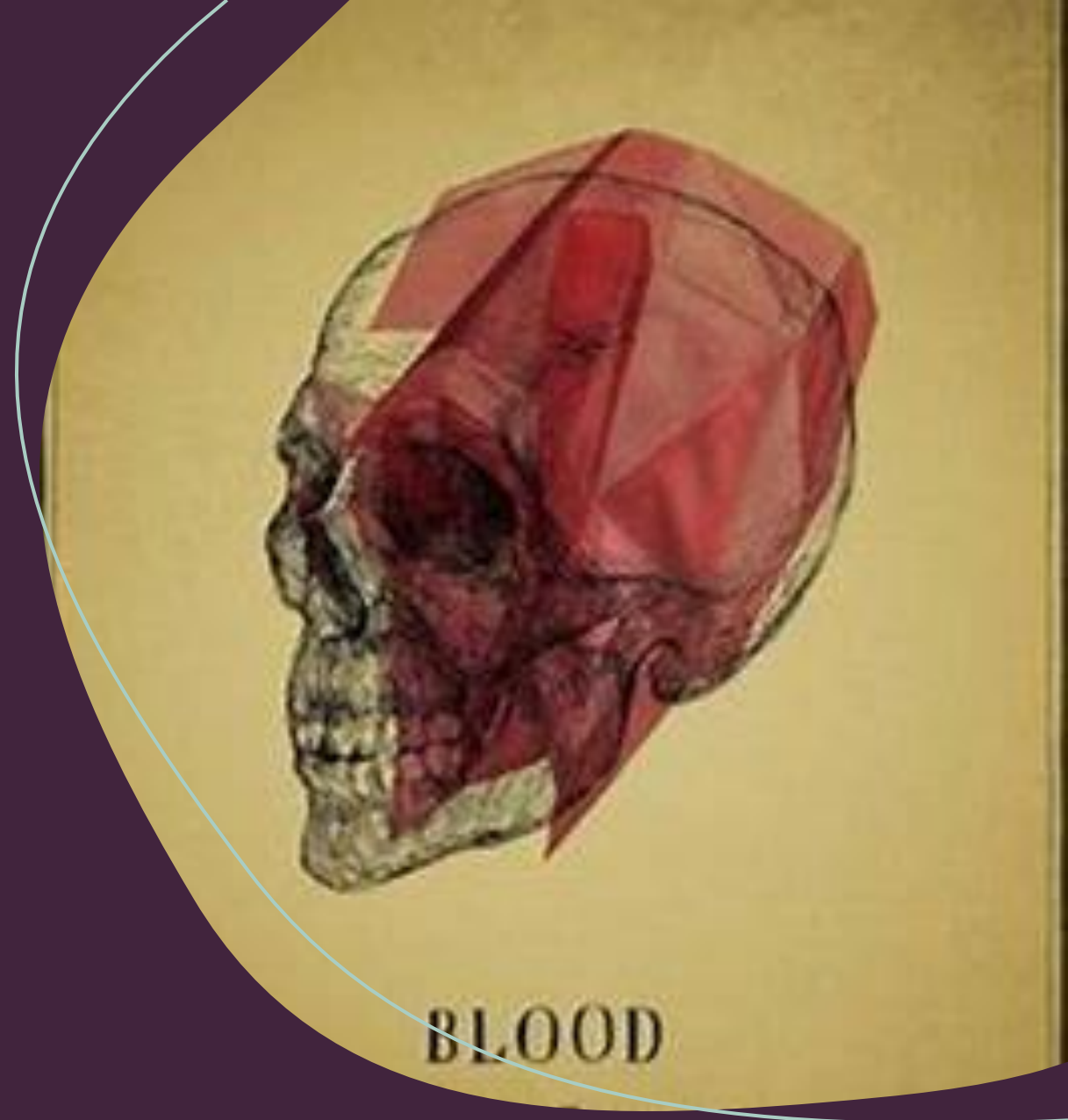
Humour: Yellow Bile

- Treatment: Bleeding and purging may also be used here, but a key feature of treatment would be to counteract the negative effects of the Hotness and Dryness of the Yellow Bile. The patient would be given cold baths, the cold and wet nature of the treatment in direct opposition to the hot and dry qualities of the yellow bile. Cold and moist foods might also be used and treatments using water lilies, lettuce and poppy seeds and a moderate intake of beer were recommended.



Humour: Blood

- Property: Hot and Wet
- The blood humour was not clearly associated with mental health disorders in Greek texts. However, the personality characteristics associated with this humour include optimism, cheerfulness and generosity and if these were felt lacking, then attempts to increase the levels of this humour might have been used.



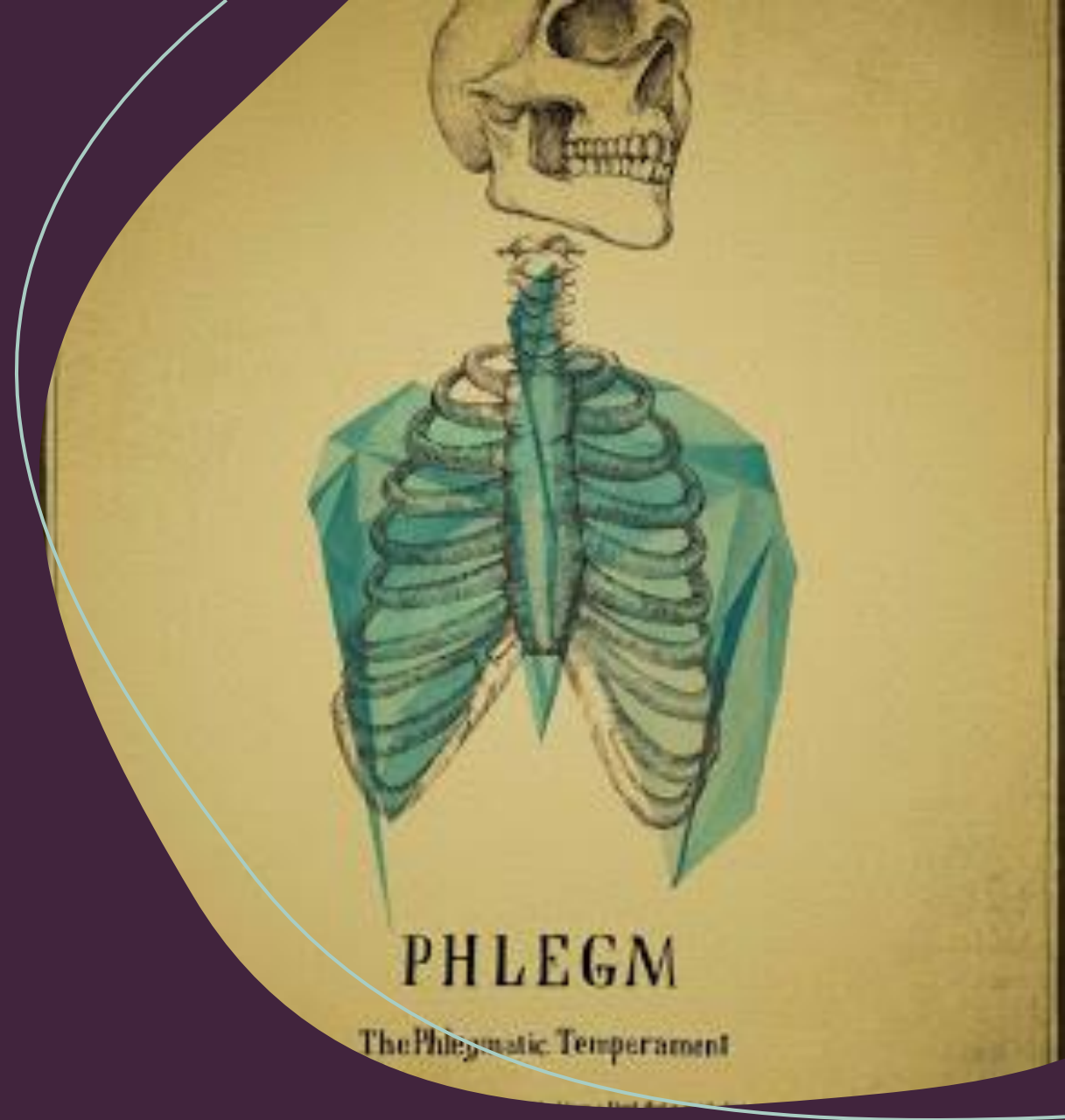
Humour: Blood

- Treatment: The levels of this humour could be enhanced by ingesting food with hot and moist qualities, such as lightly cooked goat meat. Hot baths could also be used.



Humour: Phlegm

- Property: Cold and Wet
- An excess of phlegm caused a placid form of madness, where the person was devoid of any emotion. This was the opposite of the raving madness caused by an excess of Yellow Bile. Hippocrates said '*Those who are mad from phlegm are quiet, and do not cry out nor make a noise*'.



Humour: Phlegm

- Treatment:
- Treatment here would involve a warm environment and dry foods such as bread and salted fish. The ingestion of juniper berries was also considered a cure for phlegmatic illnesses.

