

Rush also became America's first chemistry professor. He had focused on chemistry as a medical student. He was the youngest of a five-man faculty in the medical department at the College of Philadelphia. Students traveled long distances to hear his lectures and learn his clinical methods. He wrote *A Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on Chemistry*. It was the first work about chemistry written by an American and the first of 85 major publications written by Rush. He later became the medical school's dean (1804–1805).

Rush served as a physician at Pennsylvania Hospital beginning in 1783. That was the start of a long association with the

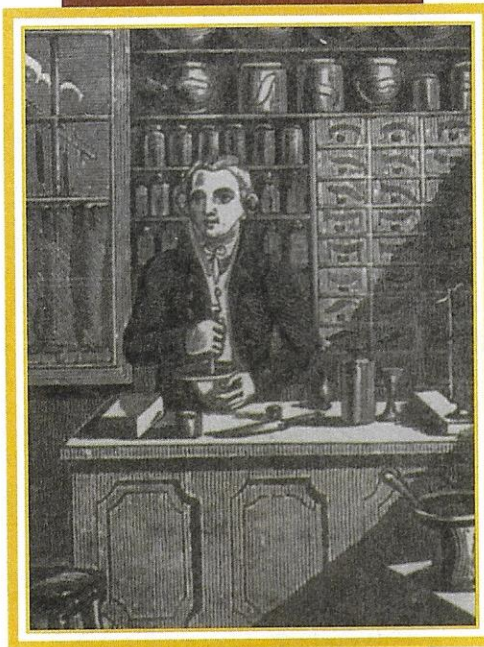
Amputating means cutting off a part of the body by surgery.

Unsterile means not free from living organisms.

hospital and the patients with mental illness that it grew to serve. In 1786, he

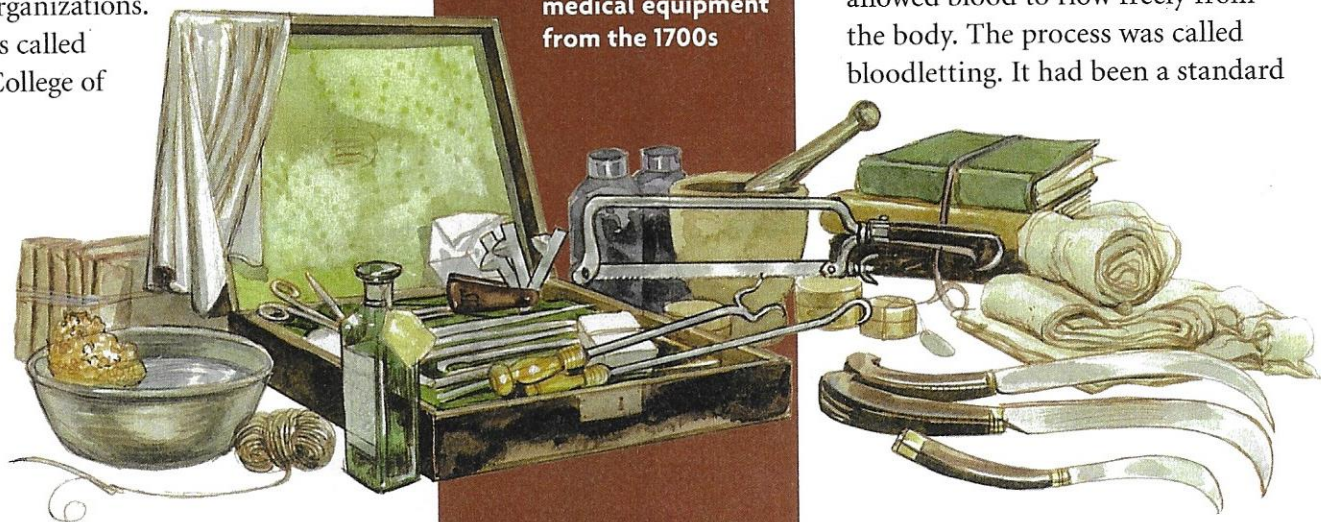
established the Philadelphia Dispensary. It was the first free clinic in the United States. It focused on providing care to poor patients. He and several other physicians treated nearly 8,000 patients in its first five years.

In 1787, Rush helped found one of the country's first professional medical organizations. It was called the College of



Colonial doctors supplied medicines and herbs to the public, much as pharmacists do today.

A doctor's set of medical equipment from the 1700s



Physicians of Philadelphia. Rush was one of 12 senior fellows at the college. Doctors met monthly to exchange ideas. They started one of the country's first medical libraries. Today, about 1,500 people are elected and are active in the organization.

Rush's reputation as a respected doctor grew over the decades. He trained apprentices and was consulted by physicians all over the country. But like other Colonial doctors, he lacked precise scientific knowledge. No one knew what caused infections. No one understood how they spread. Doctors often took the drastic step of *amputating* injured or dislocated limbs. *Unsterile* conditions led to death. Physicians couldn't measure a patient's blood pressure. They couldn't take a pulse or a temperature—stethoscopes and thermometers did not exist.

Rush's major failing as a doctor was that he believed that he knew the root of all disease—irregular pressure in a person's veins. He was certain that the way to calm that tension and restore a body's balance was to remove blood. To do that, he used a small surgical knife called a lancet to cut open a vein. That allowed blood to flow freely from the body. The process was called bloodletting. It had been a standard