

Explain why the mortality rate with medical care and treatments remained high before 1840? (12 marks)

You **may** use the following in your answer:

- Hospitals
- General Practitioners (GPs)

You **must** also use information of your own

The mortality rate with medical care and treatments remained high before 1840 because surgeons and doctors were yet to realise that germs getting into wounds following surgery or medical treatments was a major contribution to infections and for many subsequent deaths. For example, before the 1840s, hospitals were known as houses of death. Few survived amputations, as there was no anaesthesia or basic anti-infection procedures. Sir Charles Brown a surgeon from Preston in Lancashire describes in his book sixty-four years a doctor that wards were filthy, with maggot infested wounds and lice ridden bedding. Often amputations were carried out with the patient still conscious. A piece of leather was jammed in the mouth and then the saw was driven through flesh and bone. Often the wound would become infected and the patient would die of blood poisoning. Survival rates for surgery were so poor that some hospitals charged for the patient's own burial, at the same time as the operation! It is not surprising that the mortality rate remained high at this time, as this is twenty-one years before surgeons and doctors were aware of Louis Pasteur's germ theory.

The mortality rate based on the care given by GPs also remained high because.....

- Germ theory 1861
- James Simpson
- Joseph Lister
- Florence Nightingale/Mary Seacole
- Conclusion: antibiotic resistance