HBS House History Essay Competition

Who is the most important female in British History?

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Introduction:

Dame Cicely Saunders was a doctor, nurse, social worker and writer and an Anglican, who was born on 22nd June 1918 and died on 14th July 2005. Dame Cicely founded St Christopher’s Hospice which started the modern hospice movement and revolutionised palliative care in 1967. She also came up with the idea of total pain which is the idea of pain not just being physical but being emotional, spiritual and mental. Dame Cicely founded the hospice as since she was Christian, she wanted to help those who were dying. I think she was the most important female in British history because she wanted to help those who were afraid and scared of dying and help them not to be.

Arguments:

1. Dame Cicely is important because she didn’t like the way people were informed there was nothing more that could be done when they were told they had a terminal illness, so she founded the hospice to help people feel at peace when they died. She said “there is so much more to be done” for those who are dying. This helped revolutionise the way we looked at death and the way people were cared for when they were dying. Without this, people with a terminal illness would still be experiencing significantly more suffering than they are now, and they wouldn’t be cared for in the right way.

2. Dame Cicely helped get rid of some unethical practises and made sure that any medicine that was given needed to have evidence of being useful. This was important because it stopped people being given drugs that wouldn’t help at all or would make their condition worse. An example is the Brompton Cocktail, which was a mix of drugs including alcohol, morphine and cocaine, which was given to the dying. Dame Cicely carried out research that showed that only the morphine was helping the patients.

3. Dame Cicely came up with the idea of total pain which is pain that is more complicated than physical pain alone and is also emotional, spiritual and mental pain. This helped because doctors knew if someone had total pain not to just treat them with pain killers but to help them in other ways. Another idea that Dame Cicely came up with was holistic care of the patient and their family, which meant looking at all aspects that could be causing them distress and trying to help them. For example, looking at spiritual as well as physical needs of the patient.

4. Dame Cicely’s passion for spreading her ideas and teaching caused the idea of a modern hospice, the idea of “total pain” and the importance of holistic care being spread all over the world. As a result of that, she has revolutionised palliative care not only in Britain but across the world.

Conclusion

Dame Cicely devoted her life to palliative care and to make her dream possible she trained in three different professions, nurse, social worker and doctor. Because of her work there is now a specific area of medicine called palliative medicine which didn’t exist before Dame Cicely’s work. Her ideas have affected the way the dying are cared for across the world. Her ideas affect every human being alive because she revolutionised the care of people when they die – something that we will all have to face at some point.
Citations

1. Dame Cicely Saunders Her Life and Work St Christopher’s Hospice website https://www.stchristophers.org.uk/about/damecicelysaunders
2. BMJ 2005 Dame Cicely Saunders Founder of the Modern Hospice Movement https://www.bmj.com/content/331/7510/238

Bibliography

Watch with Me Inspirations for a life in hospice care Cicely Saunders 2003 Mortal Press

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