



Royal
Pharmaceutical
Society
of Great Britain

MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN

The Society's motto: *habenda ratio valetudinis*

What does the motto mean?

For many years, certainly as early as 1917 when an article on the Society's Coat of Arms appeared in *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, the somewhat free translation from the Latin most commonly adopted by the Society has been 'We must pay attention to our health.'

The motto is taken from Cicero's *De Senectute*, a dissertation on old age:

Habenda ratio valetudinis; utendum exercitationibus modicis; tantum cibi et potionis adhibendum ut reficiantur vires non opprimantur

A standard translation of this extract was quoted in a memorandum issued to the Society's inspectors in 1969. It was almost certainly familiar to schoolchildren in the 1800s and early 1900s as:

'We must pay attention to our health; we must exercise in moderation; we must take just enough food and drink to maintain our health and not to overwhelm it.'

The use of 'we must' in this context is not a literal translation. The verbs in the original Latin are, in fact, used in the gerund form and the motto might, therefore, be more literally translated as 'Having a means [or method] of health', or 'Taking account of health.' An alternative literal translation has been offered as 'A means of good health is requiring to be had'. A more useful form might be 'There must be a method of good health' or 'Account must be taken of health.'

What exactly does the Latin mean?

HABENDA: gerund form of the verb *habere* to have, with feminine ending 'a' to agree with *ratio*.

RATIO: feminine noun, can be variously translated, but can mean 'means' or 'method', or, with *habere* 'account.'

VALETUDINIS: feminine noun, 'health' in genitive form, hence 'of health'. The word can be found used to mean 'good health.'

Note: *habere rationem* translates as 'to take account of.'

This information sheet is also available in a large font size.
Please contact us on 020 7572 2210 or email
museum@rpsgb.org.