The practice of "sewage pharmacology" became widespread as people turned to unusual treatments in the hope of preventing the disease. Believing that strong odors could prevent transmission of the disease, some people would bathe daily in urine and even drank urine; others smeared human excrement on their clothing. Attempts were made to bottle flatulation; others allowed male goats to live in their houses, filling rooms with the malodorous smell of their urine. It was also the practice for people to hover over open latrines and inhale the stench. One witness reported "many were so courageous that they swallowed the pus from the mature boils in spoonfuls." Boils were incised, dried, and powdered for inhalation or administered orally in a drink. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400) describes such psychological and behavioral responses to the plague.

**NOTES**

*How did the medical knowledge of the time influence the people’s response to eradicating the plague?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main ideas</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</table>
| Bad smells/medicine used to keep disease away | • Treatments
  • “sewage pharmacology”
    o Believed smells prohibited spread
    o urine baths
    o rubbed faecal matter on clothes
    o some lived with male goats
      ▪ allowed them to urinate in homes
  • pus from boils
    o eaten
    o dried and breathed in |

**Summary** Medieval medical knowledge was limited. They had no idea how the disease was spread and they used offensive smells and tastes to treat the plague.
Paraphrased and Direct Quote Examples

McGovern & Ross (2018) explain that many people used strange treatments called “sewage pharmacology” to try to stop the spread of the plague. It was believed that strong smells, including urine and human excrement could prevent the disease spreading. In addition, “[b]oils were incised, dried, and powdered for inhalation or administered orally in a drink” (McGovern & Ross, 2018).