Forgotten: The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918

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Disclosures
  S.C. Pal: None.

Abstract
  The Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918 killed more individuals globally than World War I, yet it is often mentioned as a corollary to the war, rather than its own event. The disease played a part during the First World War, but it also affected civilians and baffled medical professionals. Despite this, the pandemic gathered little popular attention and failed to leave a literary or scientific mark, causing its near erasure in the American collective memory. The virus was strange because of its virulence and atypical patterns of infection. While soldiers struggled to define the flu and keep it from spreading, medical professionals tried to quell the rapidly growing public health crisis caused by outbreaks. Privately, doctors and nurses wrote of the disease, but publicly published little, even years after the pandemic ended. This research extensively uses primary sources to show that the pandemic of 1918 was largely forgotten because dying in war due to influenza or any other disease was seen as less honorable than dying due to combat, as evidenced by the lack of memorials for flu victims. The violent military deaths in combat overshadowed the death of soldiers dying of influenza. Consequently, those mourning felt guilty for their sorrows in juxtaposition to the War and placed less importance on the pandemic and more importance on “worthier” causes, such as the war effort. The pandemic wasn’t written on in scientific publications until the late 1900s because there wasn’t an understanding to address it. In 1918, the scientific advancements just weren’t advanced enough to explain the virus. Disease is often seen as an inevitable and natural. This, although true, does not merit the dismissive attitude that much of history has placed on the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918. How a population views a pandemic after its occurrence says much about how disease is viewed in society and in memory.