

PRHWRITERSBLOCK

Barbershop Talk

Working on the Head and in the Head



by **Robert L. Woodard**
The Wynnefield Barber



Personal questions on health-related issues become a major topic in the barber's chair. The history of the Barber's Pole represents barbers as the first surgeons and doctors. The white stripes on the Barber's Pole identified bandages and the red stripes identified human blood. There's even a statue of the first barber – Ticinius Mena – in Rome, Italy. History shows that the practice of barbering dates as far back as 296 BC. Yes, the Tonsorial Profession is one of the oldest occupations on Earth.

This history prompts me to understand how and why the profession of barbering demanded so much respect in world history. Many Barber Surgeons practiced in schools called Guilds. If anyone wanted to practice surgery and become a doctor, they had to learn from the barber-surgeon, who was the Professor of Surgery.

The story of the Barber's Pole in world history is so amazing, I decided to create the Barbershop Talk Radio Show. The idea started after an interview with the late great Georgie Woods, "The Guy With the Goods," for WDAS Radio in the station's original building at Belmont Avenue and Edgley Drive. Woods was one of the most famous DJs on radio. He was highly regarded by his peers and even was called to the White House by two Presidents to help solve the gang warfare problem in Philadelphia and other cities around our country. Woods was not just a DJ, he was a social activist. Along with his talent on the airwaves, he added "Talk Show Host" to his career titles. That is when I realized how important and how powerful it was to have a talk show on the air. Hence, the Barbershop Talk Radio Show became a reality. It started on Cody Anderson's WHAT 1480 AM before heading to WURD 900 AM. I was on the air for five years and I never missed a show. Because of the medical industry's respect for the Barber's Pole, many of my guests were doctors, surgeons, physicists, herbalists, pharmacists, scientists and even professors from the Academy of Natural Sciences to the College of Physicians.

I once visited the College of Physicians and when I walked into the building at 19 S. 22nd Street, my first question was, "Where is the Barber's Pole?" 'Up the street and around the corner,' they answered in jest. When I explained that barbers were the original surgeons and doctors, they escorted me upstairs to the Office of College Professor J. Basil and his assistant Dr. Hicks. After my conversation with them about the importance of the Barber's Pole, they agreed to join me on the Barbershop Talk Radio Show to answer questions about college physicians and their elected fellows. I recorded all of my shows because I believe the information is very educational. I look forward to sharing it online to help open minds to the interesting history of the Barber's Pole and its role in society.

Every tradition and culture around the world has barbers of its own. Their jobs focus on human health. When you look good, you feel good! When the barber finishes cutting your hair, your brain secretes natural uplifting hormones that create a satisfied feeling. Even Native Americans had medicine men that were barbers, long before the colonists arrived. They would cut the hair and feed their people herbs as they painted their faces for traditional tribal activities. In America, the barber doctor was responsible for keeping you healthy and they were only paid when you were well. In every culture, there were barbers who studied food, the medicine of nature. Herbs, fruits and vegetables have healing properties that have been used by barbers for centuries. Pharmaceuticals and drugs came later in medical industry, but it was the barber-surgeon who knew about natural antibiotics that would kill harmful bacteria.

The practice of washing your hands before surgery originated from the barber-surgeons who realized that bacteria could be deadly to patients. Medical doctors eventually learned the harmful effects of bacteria and the importance of washing your hands from barbersurgeon Dr. Peter Lister, who rewrote the medical books to include this standard surgical practice.

Yes, the history of herbs and foods are a part of families and traditions all around the world. And they have been greatly influenced by the barbershop experience dating as far back as 296 BC. Just think what it would have been like if we had radio back then. We could have used the airwaves to help spread the good news about staying healthy mentally, physically, spiritually, financially, emotionally and socially. In our respect for all holiday traditions around the world, and in memory of Georgie Woods "The Guy with the Goods," I salute all DJs and talk show hosts of the past, who helped every ethnicity and culture heal through the bedside manner of their words and music. Remember, in an ailing society, the healing process can take place, but only if we all work together as one human race. Take the RACE Test today at www.BarbershopTalkHFD.org.

Robert 'Woody' Woodard is a barber at the renowned Woody's Barber Shop.

The Barber's Pole represents the History of Barbering. Barbers were the original Doctors and Surgeons. PRH