

Intrusive Interventions (Rochester Studies in Medical History)

Graham Mooney



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The politics of public health in modern democracies concerns the balance between rights and responsibilities. This equilibrium of citizenship is under perpetual negotiation, but it was particularly intense in midnineteenth-century Britain when public health became deeply embedded as a state practice. Using extensive archival research, Intrusive Interventions examines the contested realm of Victorian liberal subjectivity through an interconnected group of policies: infectious disease reporting, domestic quarantine, mandatory removal to isolation hospital, contact tracing, and the disinfection of homes and belongings. These techniques of infectious disease surveillance eventually became one of the most powerful and controversial set of tools in modern public health. One of the crucial questions for liberal democracies has been how the state relates to the private family in shaping duties, responsibilities, rights, and needs. Intrusive Interventions argues that the gaze of public health was retrained onto everyday behaviors and demonstrates that infectious disease surveillance attempted to govern through the agency of family and through the concept of domesticity. This fresh interpretation of public health practice during the Victorian and Edwardian periods complements studies that have examined domestic visiting, the infant welfare movement, child protection, and school welfare. Graham Mooney is an assistant professor at the Institute of the History of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University.

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