Source A, a letter from Elizabeth Garrett to her friend Emily Davies 1859

I have just finished a satisfactory talk with father on the medical subject. He does not like it, I think. He said the whole idea was disgusting and he could not entertain it for a moment. I asked him what there was to make doctoring more disgusting than nursing, which women were also doing and which ladies had done in the Crimea. He could not tell me ... I think he will probably come round in time.

Source B, from the Spartacus website. In July 1860, Elizabeth’s father agreed to financially support his daughter’s attempts to become a doctor. He asked his friend, William Hawes if he could arrange medical training for Elizabeth.

Mr. Hawes advised Elizabeth to go into a surgical ward at the Middlesex Hospital for a preliminary period of six months. He could arrange this, he said. It was to test her resolution (determination) that Mr. Hawes suggested a surgical ward where conditions at that time, even in the best hospitals, were bad. Mr. Hawes knew that the sights, sounds and smells in a surgical ward would provide a searching test.... The mortality after major operations was appalling, and even in trivial cases infection might occur... Usually he washed his hands after operating, not necessarily before. Gloves were not worn. Sterilization of ligatures and instruments was unknown.

Source C, a statement by male doctors at Middlesex Hospital on the subject of women doctors, 13 June 1861.

The presence of a young female in the operating theatre is an outrage to our natural instincts and is calculated to destroy the respect and admiration with which the opposite sex is regarded.

Source D Louise Garrett Anderson describes her mother’s progress in 1861 at Middlesex Hospital in her book Elizabeth Garrett Anderson.

Elizabeth obtained a certificate of honour in each class examination; she did so well indeed that the examiner in sending her the list added, 'May I entreat (ask) you to use every precaution in keeping this a secret from the students?' In June trouble arose. The visiting doctor asked his class a question, none of the men could answer and Elizabeth gave the right reply. The students were angry and called for her dismissal. Elizabeth was told she would be admitted to no more lectures although she might finish those for which she had paid fees.
Source G
Elizabeth Garrett finally received her medical degree by taking an examination at Paris Medical School. On 20th June 1870 she received a letter of congratulations from Sophia Jex-Blake and the other six women training to be doctors in Edinburgh.

Our hearty congratulations on the brilliant success at Paris which has at length crowned your many years of arduous (hard) work - work whose difficulties perhaps no one can estimate so well as ourselves. And while congratulating you on receiving the highest honour of your profession from one of the finest medical schools in the world, we desire to express also our appreciation of the example you have afforded to others, and the honour you have reflected on all women who have chosen medicine as their profession.

Source F
In July 1863, Elizabeth Garrett applied to Aberdeen Hospital for medical training. On 29th July the hospital replied to her request.

I must decline to give you instruction in Anatomy... I have a strong conviction (belief) that the entrance of ladies into dissecting-rooms and anatomical theatres is undesirable in every respect, and highly unbecoming... it is not necessary for fair ladies should be brought into contact with such foul scenes... Ladies would make bad doctors at the best, and they do so many things excellently that I for one should be sorry to see them trying to do this one.

Source E, a photo of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson in 1870
Questions about Elizabeth Garrett Anderson

1) Read sources A, C and D. What can you learn from these sources about the attitudes of male doctors to women like Elizabeth Garrett Anderson?

2) Read source F. What are the reasons why Elizabeth was not given a place at the Aberdeen Hospital?

3) Read Source G. What evidence is there in the source that Elizabeth was a role model for other women?

4) Which source is most valuable for someone studying about Elizabeth Garrett Anderson? Give reasons for your answer.

Extension:

Write a poem / rap / song about Elizabeth Garrett Anderson for the comptonhistory website. This should focus on why she was so important as a role model for women in the history of medicine.