

The old guard of domestic medical therapy: Military Medical Academy member V.N. Sirotinin (1855–1934)

Vladimir I. Borodulin*, Mikhael V. Poddubniy*, Aleksey V. Topolyanskiy**

* N.A. Semashko National Public Health Research Institute
12 Vorontsovo Pole St., building 1, Moscow, 105064, Russia;

** The Moscow State University of Medicine and Dentistry named after A.I. Evdokimov,
The Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation
20 Delegatskaya St., building 1, Moscow, 127473, Russia

The first complete scientific biography of prominent early 20th century Russian physician V.N. Sirotinin is presented. An analysis of archival documents and the published memoirs of Sirotinin's contemporaries clarify many obscure, contradictory pieces of information concerning his life and work and reveal his role as the successor to S.P. Botkin – the leader of therapeutic clinic practice of the time. The results of competitive elections at the department of the Conference of the Military Medical Academy, the chairmanship of the 1st Congress of Russian Physicians, his approval as honorary private physician and privy councilor (after Botkin), the chairmanship at the Medical Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the testimonials of his contemporaries argue for the Sirotinin's leaders as Botkin's successor. In this article, Sirotinin's scientific legacy is analyzed. It is demonstrated that he was an outstanding bacteriologist and infectious diseases specialist and one of the founders of cardiology – a major scientific field in domestic clinical internal medicine. The authors also consider the period of Sirotinin's life, which is associated with his participation in the White movement and emigration. In the 21st century, he took the lead in the history of Russian medicine. Not the department of hospital therapy at the Military Medical Academy is named after Sirotinin.

Keywords: *history of medicine, internal medicine, therapy, V.N. Sirotinin*

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About the authors

Vladimir I. Borodulin – Doctor of Medical Sciences, Professor, Chief Researcher at the Department of the History of Medicine of N.A. Semashko National Public Health Research Institute, The Federal Agency for Scientific Institutions (Moscow). E-mail: vborodul@mail.ru,

Mikhail V. Poddubniy – Candidate of Medical Sciences, Chairman of the Department of the History of Health Service and Social Medicine of N.A. Semashko National Public Health Research Institute, The Federal Agency for Scientific Institutions (Moscow). E-mail: mihail.poddubny@yandex.ru,

Aleksey V. Topolyanskiy – Doctor of Medical Sciences, Associate Professor at the Department of Therapy, Clinical Pharmacology and Ambulance of the Moscow State University of Medicine and Dentistry named after A.I. Evdokimov; Chairman of the Cardiology Department, S.I. Spasokukotsky City Clinical Hospital (Moscow). E-mail: avtop2004@mail.ru

The beginning of the 20th century was a difficult period in the history of Russian internal medicine's clinical practice. During this period, the perception of disease and its development mechanisms substantially changed, laying the

diagnostic foundations for using instrumental methods of diagnosis. There were discussions on how to further develop clinical medicine: one focused on pathomorphology and the search for the “places where diseases dwell.” The “bacterial era” in medicine was announced, the exclusion of the concept of “functional diseases” from scientific discussion was advocated; others stressed the importance of the body as a whole (anthropopathology), a functional approach to

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Aleksey V. Topolyanskiy

the problems of disease and the development of functional diagnostics, interest in the sick person as an individual and the problems of psychosomatic disorders.

At this critical point in time, Russian clinical practice was left without its recognized leaders: S.P. Botkin and G.A. Zakharyin died at the end of the 19th century, and in the early 20th century A.A. Ostroumov left his clinical practice in Moscow and moved to Sukhumi for medical treatment. The organisation and holding of physicians congresses played a very important role in unifying the scientific and therapeutic communities and determined the further developmental path for internal medicine's clinical practice in a new environment (the first decade and a half of the 20th century). On December 19, 1909, Moscow hosted the First Congress of Russian Physicians. This event was preceded by a seven-year struggle between public figures of scientific therapeutic medicine and the bureaucratic structures of the Russian Empire for the right to hold professional congresses and create scientific societies [1]. One of the country's most reputable therapists, Professor V.N. Sirotinin (Saint Petersburg), was elected the congress's chairman. In his concluding remarks at the closing of the congress (December 23,

1909), he summed up the research work of national therapists, announcing the leaders – Kiev (the clinical practice of V.P. Obratstov and F.G. Yanovsky), followed by Saint Petersburg (Military Medical Academy, the clinical practice of V.N. Sirotinin, N.Y. Chistovich, M.V. Yanovsky), then Moscow (the faculty therapeutic clinical practice of V.D. Shervinsky – L.E. Golubinin).

On the back of a group photo (Fig. 1), which depicts V.P. Obratstov, V.D. Shervinsky and V.N. Sirotinin during the Third Congress of Russian Physicians (Moscow, December 1911), is V.D. Shervinsky's handwritten inscription: "Here as per the voters' will / Three chairmen Vasily" [2].¹ To evaluate the role of the therapeutic medicine congresses, we should remember that at the time the types of organization and management for scientific work that we are accustomed to now did not exist – the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR (later the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, beginning in 1944 and extending 70 years) and the academic councils of the Ministry of Health, as well as the academic and dissertation councils of numerous research centers, research institutes and medical schools, and a variety of scientific sessions and conferences, plus a developed network of medical journals. Only therapists' congresses, meetings of their city scientific societies and publications in individual scientific medical journals, as well as the debates found in the defenses of theses contributed to the development of scientific and public therapeutic thought, bringing together different points of view on controversial matters relating to the clinical practice of internal medicine.

Medical congresses were not the only evidence of the exceptional popularity of Sirotinin. Admittedly, he was one of the most talented students and assistants of S.P. Botkin and was famous in Europe as an outstanding clinician. His influence and position in society, including in the therapeutic environment of the



Fig. 1. V.P. Obratstov, V.D. Shervinsky and V.N. Sirotinin at the Third Congress of Russian Physicians (1911).

From the personal archive of V.D. Topolyanskiy.

¹ They were the chairmen of the first three congresses: V.N. Sirotinin, as has already been mentioned, was chairman of the first, V.D. Shervinsky was chairman of the second, and V.P. Obratstov – chairman of the third. F.G. Yanovsky and M.V. Yanovsky followed as the next two prior to World War I.

elite and the court, were exceptional. Sirotinin was almost unanimously elected to the vacant chair of the Military Medical Academy (MMA). Following on from Botkin he became a physician in ordinary and a privy councilor, and in 1915 he replaced G.E. Rein as chairman of the Medical Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The following are some of the accounts of his contemporaries. December 1915 marked the 35th anniversary of physician in ordinary Sirotinin's scientific and medical practice. *Istorichesky Vestnik* magazine wrote on this subject: "His practice has a very wide scope. After his teacher Botkin, he is almost without equal as a diagnostician. His fame in this respect is widespread, not only beyond Petrograd, but also outside of Russia. Friends, admirers and colleagues intended to mark V.N. Sirotinin's 35 years of work with a formal celebration, but the venerable hero of the anniversary declined an official celebration" [3].

In the diary of the second flagship torpedo officer, Senior Lieutenant I.I. Rengarten, there is the following note for 1915: "Wednesday, May 6. Revel. At present we do not know anything further, but the news is disturbing, yesterday comm[ander] of the fl[et – Admiral Nikolai Ottovich von Essen] was taken to the hospital... the comm[ander] has croupous pneumonia with a weak heart. The commander is in a bad way. In the morning, doctors believed the situation to be severe: croupous pneumonia and a weak heart, injections of camphor, morphine were administered; terrible weakness ...eminent people were called out, – Sirotinin departed in the morning from Petrograd by special train."²

In 1930, when Russian emigres celebrated the 50th anniversary of Sirotinin's medical practice, *Vozrozhdenie* Russian emigre newspaper, published in Paris, wrote: "Everyone knows names of Botkin, Zakharyin and Ostroumov.

Sirotinin was among those who emerged to replace them, armed with new knowledge, which those prior to him did not possess. And amongst them, he was recognized as the leading Russian therapist." [4]³



Fig. 2. V.N. Sirotinin in his office (1910).
From the personal archive of V.D. Topolyanskiy.

Vasiliy Nikolaevich Sirotinin (Fig. 2) was born on December 25th, 1855, according to the Julian calendar.⁴ The circumstances in which he spent his childhood years, and in which his moral foundations were formed, were outlined in a few lines by E.S. Botkin – his first biographer: "... On December 25, 1855, in a small outbuilding annex of one of the great houses of Zamoskvorechye, belonging to the 1st Moscow Guild of the merchant V.A. Sirotinin, to the homeowner's brother, also a Moscow merchant N.A. [Sirotinin] and his wife Yu.F. [Sirotinina], nee Khein, was born a fourth child – son Vasily. ...The entire makeup of this old, purely Russian, strictly Orthodox Sirotinin family, in which Yu.F., although of German origin, had completely assimilated and become Russified, from childhood, you can say, surrounded V.N. in the spirit of love for the people's old days, loyalty to the good old patriarchal traditions... and in 1st class at high-school, which he began attending at the 5th Moscow Classical Gymnasium ...we see that V.N. was richly gifted and capable, with a good memory and speed of thought and wit and a lively nature, cheerful character, friendly, welcoming and always ready to be helpful, we are accustomed to appreciating, honoring and loving these qualities" [7].

After graduating from high school, V.N. Sirotinin enrolled at the medical faculty of

² Russian State Archive of the Navy (RSA Navy). F. P-29. Op. 1. D. 199. P. 153–154.

³ Hereinafter citations have been used retaining their original formulation.

⁴ The conversion of V.N. Sirotinin's date of birth to the Gregorian calendar without appropriate comments led to an error. Thus, a number of sources [5, 6] indicated that he was born in 1856.

Imperial Moscow University (IMU) in 1873. In the third year, he took the novel decision to stay for an additional year “for perfection in the sciences” (a petition addressed to the rector of the IMU from 07.05.1876).⁵ At the end of 1877, he submitted the following petition to the rector: “Not being able to stay at Moscow university for family reasons, I humbly beg Your Excellency to make an order for the handing over of my papers and certificates of consistency of my medical assistant exam with a note confirming my success in the sciences. Student Vasily Sirotinin.”⁶ From September 15, 1877, he continued his education as a student in the third course of the Saint Petersburg Medical-Surgical Academy, “attracted by the brilliant staff of professors” (E.S. Botkin).

V.N. Sirotinin graduated from the Imperial Medical-Surgical Academy (IMSA) with honors and received a silver medal for his work carried out in the laboratory of Professor A.P. Dobroslavin (“On the question of the accuracy of the quantitative determination of ammonia in water using the color method”); in 1880, he was “recognized as a physician,” and at the Academy Conference of January 16, 1881 he was “chosen to stay at the academy for professional development” (Sirotinin’s records from 1881).⁷ “On November 20, 1881, he was appointed to serve for professional development on the staff of the Clinical Hospital as one of a number of physicians. He was approved for attending physician duties from November 20, 1881. As a junior doctor he was transferred to the Main Military Medical Directorate (MMMD) at the based at the 102nd Vyatsky Infantry Regiment on September 1, 1883, remaining at the clinical military hospital until the end of the three-year period. He was recognized as a doctor at the IMSA Conference on May 5, 1884. On the occasion of his secondment abroad, he was enrolled MMMD⁸ at the military-medical office from December 4, 1884. He was sent abroad on January 24, 1885.” (From the records... of the

doctor of medicine of the collegiate assessor Sirotinin from 1886).⁹

Sirotinin’s three-year residency took place in the academic therapy clinic, led by S.P. Botkin. In 1884, under the leadership of Botkin he carried out and defended a clinical-experimental thesis on “the question of potassium salts’ effects on heart and blood circulation” [12]. At the same time he published a report on observations he made in the Botkin clinic of “cases of an aortic aneurysm” with a specific clinical picture [13], as well as the part of Botkin’s lectures compiled by him, dedicated to typhoid, chlorosis, pernicious anemia, inflammation of the kidneys, acute articular rheumatic fever, aneurysms of the ascending aorta, moving kidneys and spleen. After that, the conference approved sending him at public expense on a two-year scientific mission abroad. Presenting it at the tender, Botkin said that “all of these works demonstrate the young scientist’s scientific training and ability to work independently,” that “in his clinical activities he has always had a love for the cause, good faith and objectivity in his observations, which will give him the opportunity to develop as an entirely good clinician” [14].

In Germany, Austria and France, Sirotinin attended lectures and conducted research in clinics and laboratories of the renowned European physicians, neurologists and psychologists E.V. Leyden, C.W.H. Nothnagel, J.M. Charcot, K. Ludwig and others. Upon his return to Saint Petersburg, he presented his work, which was reviewed and approved by Professor Botkin, V.A. Manassein and Yu.T. Chudnovsky, and after presenting two trial lectures at the academy (on the experimental data on the etiology of typhoid fever and demonstration of a patient with heart disease) on May 2, 1887, he was approved as a “private teacher” (privatdozent) at the academy of internal medicine.

In conjunction with his work at the Military Medical Academy, Sirotinin was a senior attending doctor at the city barracks hospital (1889, later named after S.P. Botkin). Later he was the head doctor of the St. Mary Magdalene city hospital (1890–1891) and the St. George Community Hospital (1891–1895) (documents on the appointing of Sirotinin as senior doctor

⁵ E.S. Botkin further clarified – to “thoroughly engage histology under the guidance of Prof. Babukhin” [7].

⁶ Central State Historical Archive in Moscow. F. 418. Op. 287. D. 243. P. 2, 4, 8, 9, 12.

⁷ Russian State Military History Archive (RSMHA). F. 546. Op. 2. D. 1196. P. 469.

⁸ MMMD – Main Military Medical Directorate.

⁹ RSMHA F. 546. Op. 2. D. 6479. P. 494–499.

of the hospital... and the chief physician of the St. George Community...¹⁰ At his last post he was appointed a staff member of the Clinical Military Hospital with the responsibility as head physician to present the course of internal medicine to the academy students (“the right of petition enlisting him to the acting rank of extraordinary or ordinary professor”). In each of these hospitals, he proved himself not only as a competent, passionate physician and administrator, but also as an organizer; he equipped or built laboratories and attracted staff for research, built marshalling barracks and completed the equipping of hydrotherapeutic establishments and departments for therapeutic massage and therapeutic exercises. According to E.S. Botkin, “it was his fate, and a great one – to raise and enliven the science side of the institution’s activities, which he came to lead, and which he quite recently rebuilt, enlarged and revitalized with quite extensive laboratory facilities for doctors and students in hospital therapy clinic practice, which he manages at the present time” [8]. Every year Sirotinin presented to students “private courses at the clinic of internal medicine for ambulatory patients, and at hospitals in the city... at inpatient clinics” [17]. In Botkin’s later years of life, during his illness and treatment abroad, and also in the first year after his death in Menton (1889), on order of the Conference his clinic was led by M.V. Yanovsky, “together with two other assistants of S.P. Botkin – N.I. Sokolov and V.N. Sirotinin,” the first of whom “was tasked with practical training, and the second – lessons in clinical bacteriology” [18]. Sirotinin also gave lectures on infectious diseases, and from 1893 taught doctors seconded to the MMA.

In 1890 and 1892, Sirotinin participated in the tender for the vacant chair of hospital therapy and private pathology and therapy; he did not pass the

competition, but had, as they said, “received a lot of votes.” The tender committee of the academy professors noted that he was a scientist with “very solid scientific training in experimental pharmacology and pathology, physiology and bacteriology, sufficient practical experience in the monitoring and treatment of internal diseases, experience in teaching, and so on.” His clinical and experimental thesis material and work on the importance of products of bacteria metabolism was recognized as “most outstanding”; its author was described as being an exceptional bacteriologist. Therefore the results of voting at the ballot in the department of private pathology and therapy, which was held on 22.12.1894, were not surprising: Sirotinin was almost unanimously elected professor (29 voted for him out of 31 participants, 19 voted for M.V. Yanovsky, 13 for M.G. Kurlov, 11 for N.Ya Chistovich, seven for S.S. Botkin and three for M.M. Volkov) [14]. This points to the fact that by the

time Sirotinin became a professor he had the highest authority, and by the beginning of the 20th century, he was the leader of the school of S.P. Botkin, who had passed away (Fig. 3).

From 1903, Sirotinin was head of the department of hospital therapy and director of hospital therapeutic clinical practice at the academy. Another leading department, the faculty or academic therapy department, was led by S.S. Botkin – son of the great clinician. In 1907, Sirotinin was awarded the honorary title of academic of the Imperial Military Medical Academy.¹¹ From a historical essay on the 125th anniversary of the department of hospital therapy it follows that his scientific and pedagogical activities in this period included “very valuable research on bacteriology and infectious diseases, chlorosis, pernicious anemia, diffuse inflammation of the kidneys, acute articular rheumatic fever, aortic aneurysm and



Fig. 3. V. N. Sirotinin with an enameled badge featuring the Red Cross symbol (1914).
From the personal archive of A.V. Topolyanskiy.

¹⁰ Central State Historical Archive of Saint Petersburg (CSHA Saint Petersburg). F. 403. Op. 1. D. 304. P. 21, 27, 30; CSHA Saint Petersburg. F. 204. Op. 1. D. 669. P. 3.

¹¹ RSMHA F. 316. Op. 41. D. 2337. P. 1.

more” [20]. However, this is an obvious mistake: with the exception of bacteriology issues, the situation concerns fragments of S.P. Botkin’s lectures, recorded and prepared for printing and publication by privatdozent Sirotinin. These fragments were published in the Clinical Weekly Newspaper in 1884 [21].

The nature of Professor Sirotinin’s scientific work as chair of private pathology and therapy, as well as at the department of hospital therapy, was unique. He did not leave a large collection of works summarizing the many years of research conducted by the staff team following a unified plan (such as was the result of, for example, the teachings of M.V. Yanovsky on the peripheral heart), he did not produce fundamental discoveries (such as, for example, Obratsov’s description of vivo diagnosis of acute thrombosis of the coronary arteries of the heart). Three main areas can be identified in his scientific heritage.

The first is related to his promotion of Botkin’s views and the creation of a scientific biography of the great clinician. Over the years, Sirotinin published teachers’ lectures (numerous editions, 1888–1912). Beginning in 1889, he returned to the writing of his scientific biography. The names of Sirotinin’s publications on this topic are as follows: “S.P. Botkin” (*Novoe Vremya*, 1889), “S.P. Botkin (1832–1889)” (Saint Petersburg, 1889); “S.P. Botkin (A Biographical Essay)” (“S.P. Botkin’s Course on Clinical Practice of Internal Medicine” 2nd Ed. 1899, 3rd Ed. 1912), “In Memory of S.P. Botkin” (*Russky Vrach*, 1908), “S.P. Botkin” (*Vrachebnoye Delo*, 1928). Note that the editorial board of the Kharkov journal *Vrachebnoye Delo* took the risk of publishing in 1928 an article written by a white emigrant professor. A clarification can be found in M.M. Levit’s medical publishing reference book: “Reflecting on the early stages of activities, the wavering of some of the medical intelligentsia, taking a position of political apathy, the editorial board made a lot of serious mistakes” [22]. Sirotinin’s essays, along with publications of N.A. Belogolovy (1892, 1898), formed the basis for subsequent work on the great Russian therapist and our ideas concerning him.

Sirotinin’s second main field for his scientific papers concerned his work on a cardiologist profile: the beginning of this work (1883–1884) concerns a previously described case of an

aortic aneurysm and his thesis on clinical and experimental study of the therapeutic action of potassium on the heart and blood vessels, and by the end of his activities – clinical practice lectures [23]. These lectures were devoted to heart disease and were permeated with S.P. Botkin’s ideas and opinions. Their author was a consistent supporter of the functional fields (Sirotinin noted that “the object of our activities should primarily be the preservation of heart muscle function”). In clinical medicine the Sirotinin-Kukoverov symptom was isolated in atherosclerotic and syphilitic lesions of the initial part of the aorta: with patients in a position with their hands behind their head, a systolic murmur at the aorta appears or worsens.

N.G. Kukoverov was a student of Sirotinin and his clinical assistant, and described the history of this priority research: “A few years ago, my esteemed teacher Prof. V.N. Sirotinin first noticed that a systolic murmur appears in a limited area in the second right intercostal space at or near the sternum, in some people when in a standing position, as soon as the patient raises his arms up... On the basis of these observations Prof. V.N. Sirotinin began to assign great clinical importance to this phenomenon, recognizing that it points to the start of aortic sclerosis, as he has repeatedly told his students in recent years” [24]. In order to more accurately discover what kind of patients have this symptom, Kukoverov examined more than 2,000 patients and was convinced of the diagnostic value of this symptom. There is no doubt: Sirotinin can be considered one of the most prominent physicians, laying the foundations for Russia’s future clinical cardiology.

Sirotinin’s original and significant research, devoted to the problems of bacteriology, immunology and infectious diseases in clinical practice, constituted the third field of his scientific activity. It started with experimental and bacteriological research related to the etiology of typhoid and accumulation in the body of bacterial products exchange as a factor in the formation of acquired immunity to infectious diseases (1887–1889). It continued with a report on the results of treatment of consumption (TB) using the R. Koch method (with very cautious conclusions; 1891), criticisms made by the clinician on F.F. Erisman’s views of cholera’s contagiousness, and general statements on the

treatment of cholera (1892) and other conditions. In addition, the medical records of the St. George Community (1889–1894), with the development of clinical practice materials, were his.

A variety of scientific papers describes Sirotinin as a general profile physician. At the same time the main theme of his research was in keeping with the spirit of the time: in the early 20th century, the dominant concern in domestic therapy was infectious diseases and diseases of the heart and blood vessels, which was due on the one hand to a predominance of infectious types of pathologies, and the other with the rapid development of clinical physiology and new functional diagnostic methods.

The question of whether Sirotinin left a legacy of an original scientific school remains open. His contemporaries spoke and wrote about his school, noting that its head's hallmark features can be found in it: "Infinite patience, a delicate approach, evenhandedness and a sincere simplicity in his addresses, ... a friendly ability to understand each person, with which he approaches his students by their own definition" [8]. The album that the staff of the hospital therapeutic clinic presented to their director, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of his scientific and medical activities, included 140 photos of the resident physicians of his clinics [25]. However, out of his many students, in the history of domestic therapy only one name remains – Leningrad physician and AMS USSR academic Mikhail Vasilyevich Chernorutsky [26].

Along with Chernorutsky, S.I. Zlatogorov was assigned to the staff of the department of hospital therapy at the MMA [20]. However, according to other sources, it seems that this outstanding Soviet bacteriologist, epidemiologist and infectious disease specialist and corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1929) should be called a student of Chistovich or S.S. Botkin and Chistovich. Do we have enough grounds to talk about an original scientific school of Sirotinin, especially given the "background" – the presence of the large clinical schools of his closest academy colleagues – Chistovich and M.V. Yanovsky. This question, of course, requires further study.

The realisation of such a remarkable talent, including the creation of his own school, could have been hindered by several factors. First of all was his personality: Sirotinin was a typical

Epicurean, or, as they often say, a man of pleasure. He was bright, cheerful and witty, very sociable and charmingly full of life the antithesis of his closest colleague in therapeutic clinical practice at the academy, M.V. Yanovsky, who recalled: "Our clinics existed for many years – one to the right and the other to the left. Sirotinin himself drank and loved to prescribe it to patients. I never drank and did not prescribe it to patients. I cannot say that the results of treatment in my clinic have been better" (from the memoirs of Professor L.P. Pressman, a student and biographer of Yanovsky.)¹²

Sirotinin was constantly overloaded with professional, public, government, and other responsibilities. As a member of Red Cross's Main Directorate (from 1900) he was a member of the Executive Committee for assisting wounded and sick soldiers in the Far East during the Russian-Japanese War (1904–1905). Meetings of the commission "took place on a daily basis for the first five months and then later two to three times a week ...V.N. Sirotinin was tasked with the preparation of Red Cross nurses, outfitting and then sending them to the Far East. ... The war came to an end...Russia suffered a new misfortune – a poor grain harvest in the fertile provinces in 1906. The Red Cross went to work once again – to alleviate the plight of victims of the crop failure" [27]. In 1900, the Saint Petersburg Doctors Society for Mutual Assistance elected him "to the most honorable physician post – judge of honor," and for 10 years he carried out "these extremely sensitive and troublesome obligations" [8]. In 1905, the Society of Russian Physicians in Saint Petersburg elected him an honorary member as "indispensable secretary" in the years 1890–1896, and then later – comrade (i.e., deputy) chairman. In 1890–1895, he edited *Bolnichnaya Gazeta Botkina* newspaper (a publication that was the successor to *Ezhenedelnaya Klinicheskaya Gazeta* newspaper created by S.P. Botkin).

Sirotinin's lectures were brilliantly presented. His numerous reports and presentations were outstanding in form and content. He was surrounded by loving and admiring patients, colleagues, staff and cadets. Sirotinin had an extensive private practice: numerous people

¹² The record of the conversation is in the personal archive of V.I. Borodulin.

liked to consult with “the No. 1 therapist” and he, a man of rare responsiveness, could not refuse anyone. However, “private medical practice, practicing at the court and, from 1910, public service, sharply distracted him from his work at the academy. He frequently came to lectures unprepared, seeing a patient in the auditorium for the first time and giving lectures practically extempore. This could not but affect the work of the clinic, especially during World War I, when many senior and experienced staff went to the front” [20].

In marked contrast to all that has been mentioned, which can be called a “subjective factor,” the other circumstance was objective. As a former physician in ordinary at the Court of His Majesty (1910) and privy councilor (1913), advisory member (1897), and from 1915 the chairman of the Medical Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and member of the Main Directorate of the Red Cross, Sirotinin did not accept the events of October 1917 and from 1918 he took part in the White Movement, he was chairman of the Medical Council of the commander of the Armed Forces of South Russia (AFSR) General A.I. Denikin.¹³ Sirotinin then emigrated. In Belgrade, he worked as a hospital consultant and was a doctor to Peter I of Serbia (in connection with this, on the anniversary of his 50 years of medical practice, Alexander I of Yugoslavia awarded him the Order of St. Sava 1st degree with a star and the royal rescript). In 1921, he was elected chairman of the Russian-Serbian Medical Society. In 1924, the Sirotinin family moved to Paris, where the renowned Russian doctor continued his professional activities, treated many famous people, and for his services to science he was awarded the order of the Legion of Honor.

Sirotinin did not go hungry and was not poverty-stricken, as was the case with many emigre doctors. He lived and died in the quiet and pleasant suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine – a small town between the Seine and the border of Paris. Together with him was his faithful companion through life – Ekaterina Nikolaevna

Sirotinina (nee Sobinina), a doctor at the hospital in Voskresensk, and later in Saint Petersburg [29, 30]. She was younger than her husband, survived him by four years and is buried next to him. Their two sons lived in Paris – Sergey (born in 1890, a lawyer) and Nikolai (born in 1892, a railroad engineer). Another of their sons – Georgy Vasilevich Sirotinin (1894–1965, buried in Leningrad) – graduated in 1917 from the Naval Academy. He remained in Soviet Russia and was a military doctor; he was not, apparently, exposed to repression. However, despite V.N. Sirotinin’s apparent well-being during his time in Paris, life could not have been easy for the former representative of Saint Petersburg high society. The following is one of the accounts of that life.

“French law forbids all doctors who do not have a French diploma from working in the medical profession ...After many years of negotiations between the board of the union of French doctors and the Mechnikov Society of Russian Physicians, an oral agreement was concluded, by virtue of which the French syndicate undertook not to obstruct Russian emigre doctors from treating the population of “Russian Paris”. But God forbid, if even one of them dares to give a prescription to a French patient! There will be no mercy...

Several court sessions paint a surprising picture. With a monotonous tone the secretary reads a “case” presentation, of which dozens are considered a day ...And among them in order of priority “a certain V.N. Sirotinin was illegally engaged in medical activities” ...the lawyer “of a certain Sirotinin” uses all his eloquence to defend his client. He shakes in the air his client’s diploma, which has been translated into French; reads a long list of his scientific works; points out that the name of the Military Medical Academy professor – Sirotinin – is known to medical practitioners all over the world; he recalls that his client had the rank of physician in ordinary to His Majesty the Russian Emperor; he treated the French President Poincaré when he came to Saint Petersburg and had a stomach ache from a copious Russian feast and Russian vodka; finally, that his client acted with the most humane motives and caused nobody any harm.

The judges, with a frozen look, coldly listen to the lawyer. The chairman of the court, referring to him in an expressionless voice, said: “All this

¹³ In § 1 order of the main command of the AFSR No. 936 of May 18, 1919, it is noted that “Professor Emeritus and Privy Councilor Sirotinin was appointed Chairman of the Medical Council” [28].

is true, my dear lawyer, but we are servants of the law. It was established that the defendant was illegally engaged in medical practice. And that was all. The rest does not interest us. Article such and such... a fine of 1,500 francs. Next!" [31].

However, Sirotinin continued not only his medical activities, but also his public, scientific, social and charitable activities. So, at a scientific meeting of the I.I. Mechnikov Society of Russian Physicians, he presented a report – “On some peculiarities of the progression of scarlet fever in adults.” A.I. Kuprin noted: “In Paris, the Russian Society provides help to sick and underprivileged students. Its chairman was V.N. Sirotinin, its deputy chairmen: M.A. Aldanov and S.A. Smirnov, the treasurer and at the same time heart of the society was M.N. Aitova. With a relentless energy the society carried out its important and virtuous work. I have heard many stories about the society’s activities and have also had a chance to read a large number of letters, both pleading and grateful: and both were touchingly sincere and extremely sensitive” [32].

Sirotinin practiced medicine throughout the last years of his life. “...His clear simplicity of thought did not abandon him in the most difficult moments. Several years ago, V.N. [Sirotinin] was seriously ill, and as always happens with good doctors, with something quite unexplainable. All the leading figures of Russian emigre medicine gathered around his bed. French masters also came. As always, the bustle and confusion were unbelievable, they all appeared separately, made conflicting prescriptions and expressed aloud the worst assumptions. The patient, desperately cursing, crushed all their diagnoses for the most basic of reasons. I asked him: ‘So in the end, what do you have, Vasiliy Nikolaevich [Sirotinin]?’ ‘God knows what! Only, of course, not what they say. That’s as clear as day...’ He lived a long productive life as a great scientist, practitioner,

administrator. The conclusion of a half-century of work is concluded in a miserable refugee apartment, away from friends, colleagues and students, face to face with a true, old friend and homemaker. The bitter lot of the majority of outstanding people” [5].

Sirotinin died of a heart attack, before reaching his 80th birthday, a man sick and tired of life. He was buried in the Sainte-Genevieve-des-Bois Russian Cemetery. In 1934, the popular Russian emigre newspaper *Poslednie Novosti* published an obituary in which he was named “the biggest name in Russian medicine”: “...Closing the last page of an era in the history of our medicine, directly related to the renowned S.P. Botkin, the most talented student ...who was the late V.N. [Sirotinin] ...In spite of his past laurels that continued in exile, V.N. Sirotinin remained a modest and accessible person. ...He calmly and clearly foresaw his impending end, he desired his own passing, seeking in it the *great peace*” [33]. The author of his obituary in *Vozrozhdenie* wrote: “He possessed a name known Russia-wide, and not only Russia-wide – he was known everywhere ...Which famous people did Sirotinin treat? Answer: “Who didn’t Sirotinin

treat! He was old. No one knew exactly how old he was. They said that he was about 80. Two years ago he was still, despite his advanced age, involved in medical practice” [34]. Other centers of Russian emigration also spoke out. Thus, *Russky Golos* (Belgrade) noted that “in Paris, January 12 saw the passing of Professor Vasiliy Sirotinin – famous in Europe and the pride of Russian medicine.” Even in America, *Novy Russky Mir* placed an appropriate obituary in the column Russian Deaths. In Russia, the name of this outstanding figure of internal medicine clinical practice has been erased from the history pages of domestic medicine for many decades. He is not referred to in such an authoritative reference work as the State Historical Library Index publication



Fig. 4. A plaque at the entrance to the Department of Hospital Therapy at the S.M. Kirov Military Medical Academy.
From the personal archive of A.V. Topolyanskiy.

“Russia and the Russian Emigration in Memoirs and Diaries” and he is not in the collections of the Solzhenitsyn House for the Russian Diaspora in Moscow. In the 21st century, the time has come for his honorable return to the pages of the historical record of the domestic clinical practice of internal medicine (particularly cardiology), to the history of the Military Medical Academy

and scientific clinical schools of S.P. Botkin: the Department of Hospital Therapy at the Military Medical Academy has been bestowed with the name of V.N. Sirotinin¹⁴ (Fig. 4).

¹⁴ Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Council of the academy No. 7, February 24, 2015.

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About the authors

Vladimir Iosifovich Borodulin – Doctor of Medical Sciences, Professor, Chief Researcher at the Department of the History of Medicine of N.A. Semashko National Public Health Research Institute, The Federal Agency for Scientific Institutions (Moscow).

Mikhail Viktorovich Poddubniy – Candidate of Medical Sciences, Chairman of the Department of the History of Health Service and Social Medicine of N.A. Semashko National Public Health Research Institute, The Federal Agency for Scientific Institutions (Moscow).

Aleksey Viktorovich Topolyanskiy – Doctor of Medical Sciences, Associate Professor at the Department of Therapy, Clinical Pharmacology and Ambulance of the Moscow State University of Medicine and Dentistry named after A.I. Evdokimov; Chairman of the Cardiology Department, S.I. Spasokukotsky City Clinical Hospital (Moscow).