

Maxim Petrovich Konchalovsky. On the 140th anniversary of his birth

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the 140th anniversary of the birth of the outstanding Russian physician M.P. Konchalovsky, one of the leaders of the national clinical department of internal medicine. The basic stages of his life and career are described: emergence as a physician and scientist, working in the position of head of the hospital therapeutic clinic of the Moscow Higher Courses for Women and chair of the Faculty Therapeutic Clinic of Moscow University.

Based on Konchalovsky's memoirs, the article shows the role of the family in shaping his outlook and the role of his teachers – V.D. Shervinsky and L.E. Golubinin – in his becoming a physician and scientist. The themes of his scientific papers for congresses and conferences are addressed, reflecting their tremendous scientific value. Konchalovsky was interested in various fields of medicine. He successfully combined intensive medical and teaching work with social work. Based on the memoirs of his students, the characteristics of a born leader, a prominent physician and a wonderful teacher are revealed.

An analysis of the professional and social work of Konchalovsky allows us to conclude that he possessed an amazing capacity for work, supported by a sense of responsibility for his work and love for the cause of his life – clinical medicine for internal diseases.

Keywords: history of medicine, internal medicine, therapy, M.P. Konchalovsky

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The Path Begins

Maxim Petrovich Konchalovsky, one of the most important figures in Russian clinical and internal medicine during the first half of the 20th century, was born on the 14th of October, 1875 in Odessa. He also spent some of his childhood in Kharkov. His father, Petr Petrovich Konchalovsky, taught at the science department of the Faculty of Math and Physics at Saint Petersburg and was an all-around man of letters, translating foreign language novels into Russian (including Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*). He was also involved in the book publishing industry. Being a man of well-

rounded education, Petr Petrovich introduced his children to world literature, music, painting, and theater at an early stage in their lives.

Konchalovsky's family was sympathetic to democratic and revolutionary movements (they even sheltered Vera Figner when she was hiding from police) and also had extensive contacts in the world of high culture¹.

Konchalovsky wrote of his father, "For his idealism, for his desire for progress and justice, he was a typical member of the revolutionary *intelligentsia* of the 60s (the so-called "men of the sixties"), yet at the same time he remained an individual, belonging to no political party or

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¹ In his school years, Maxim was acquainted with M.A. Vrubel. Konchalovsky's younger brother Petr became a distinguished painter and married the daughter of V.I. Surikov [1, 2].

group... But his whole life he was in opposition to and against the government and against religion, against obscurantism and ignorance... His influence on people, especially young people, and on us, his children, was enormous... Above all, he taught us to nourish within us two aspects of the human soul: the intellect and the heart. And he did everything with a lofty and warm character, entirely free of any narrow-minded, mundane aspirations” [3].

Konchalovsky’s decision to become a doctor was influenced by family stories of his grandfather, who had been a ship’s doctor under Admiral P.S. Nakhimov, serving in the Crimean War and later becoming head doctor of the city hospitals in Kharkov, Chernigov, and Perm. Thus, having made his decision to study medicine, Konchalovsky entered the medical faculty at Moscow University (fig. 1)².

For his upper-level courses, Konchalovsky attended lectures given by the most respected doctors of the day, including Moscow University professors N.F. Filatov, S.S. Korsakov, A.A. Ostroumov, and A.Ya. Kozhevnikov. According to Konchalovsky, “starting with Bobrov’s very first lecture, I developed a distaste for surgery. In order to make a lasting impression on students in his first lecture, Bobrov had displayed resections of the upper jaw on three operating tables... The whole bloody scene left a lasting impression on my nerves. It probably turned more timid souls away from the specialty altogether. It is said that one’s first impression is one’s last impression. Perhaps this experience determined my future career in internal medicine – it’s hard to say. In any event, I began to diligently apply myself to therapeutic medicine and its related fields” [3].

In his third year, Konchalovsky helped his father to translate a textbook edited by renowned therapist V.D. Shervinsky. Konchalovsky describes this event in his memoirs, writing, “I was introduced to V.D. Shervinsky by... my father. My father had invited Shervinsky to edit a translation of a book



Fig. 1. M.P. Konchalovsky – Student (1987).

by Gaston Lyon called *Manual on the Treatment of Internal Diseases*, and the translation was to be carried out by me. I undertook this endeavor with great enthusiasm... V.D. Shervinsky was at that time very popular and also very busy, so I visited him intermittently to read him my translation, which he approved” [3].

It is not surprising that, having graduated from Moscow University in 1899 and having received his diploma in medicine with honors, Konchalovsky began to work as an extern (an unpaid hospital doctor) at the faculty therapy clinic of Moscow University under V.D. Shervinsky. Konchalovsky

recalled, “In 1899, when V.D. Shervinsky took over the department from Zakharyin, I remained at the clinic and to this day maintain a very warm friendship with V.D. This friendship has



Fig. 2. M.P. Konchalovsky and I.V. Rukavishnikov.

² All illustrations and photos are taken from [4].

strengthened over the years as V.D. has left his many responsibilities and his heart has become softer and more open... I remember with particular gratitude his assistant Golubinin, who took on all of the clinical work and from whom I learned my method of clinical research. I accompanied him on his afternoon and evening rounds and learned a great deal from him” [3].

Konchalovsky’s externship work was interrupted in 1900, when, as a young and promising doctor, he was invited to Petersburg to serve as personal physician to privy councillor Ivan Vasilievich Rukavishnikov (fig. 2), whose wife was in the terminal stages of colorectal cancer. Rukavishnikov quickly took a liking to the young doctor and paid him an enormous salary, but Konchalovsky wanted to return to his studies in Moscow. He had decided to give up what he considered to be an uninteresting and psychologically draining job when Rukavishnikov himself fell ill (he was diagnosed with sarcoma). It was only after the death of Rukavishnikov, and later of his wife, that Konchalovsky returned to Moscow to continue his studies.

In 1902, Konchalovsky began to attend meetings of the Moscow Therapeutic Society, whose chairman was V.D. Shervinsky. Konchalovsky wrote, “My externship ended in 1904 and I stood before a new stage in my life, which although it would be difficult to navigate, would in large part define and ensure my future progress... I presented several papers at the Therapeutic Society, V.D. Shervinsky asked me to conduct evening lessons with students, and finally, in 1905, he offered me the position of additional clinic assistant. I was very happy, as this was the most important event in my life, determining once and for all my academic future which would from that point forward takeoff, unfettered by gravity. With this act, V.D. Shervinsky, as he later told me, keenly anticipated my future fate, and I became his favorite student who, in the end, took over all of his responsibilities both in the clinic and in the Society” [5]. We should note that in 1923 Konchalovsky became the chairman of the Moscow Therapeutic Society and in 1929, he became the head of the department of faculty therapy of Moscow University. At the 35 year an-



Fig. 3. Faculty therapy clinic (1910).

In the first row: L.E. Golubinin (6th from the right), to the right of him – M.P. Konchalovsky.

niversary of Konchalovsky's career, V.D. Shervinsky concluded his congratulatory speech with the following words: "How sweet it is when the student surpasses his teacher".

In 1907, V.D. Shervinsky retired and his closest colleague³, professor L.E. Golubinin, was chosen to succeed him, leaving the situation in the clinic relatively unchanged (fig. 3).

In 1911, Konchalovsky defended his dissertation on "Gastric Achillea" in which he revealed the causes of function and organ achillea, described the dynamics of gastric secretions and demonstrated the relativity of normal indicators. He himself evaluated his work in a modest way, writing, "Did I accomplish anything novel in "Gastric Achillea"? Frankly, no. My book quite thoroughly shows a connection between the clinic and physiology and that physiological field which has contributed so much to our knowledge" [3]. In 1912, Konchalovsky gave a lecture that would be used to evaluate his ability to be privat-docent. The lecture was on "Secretory Nerves of the Stomach", in which he highlights the role of the central nervous system in regulating secretion and motor functions in the stomach and points to the need to assess the condition of the nervous system of patients when treating stomach diseases. He was soon confirmed as privat-docent (fig.4).

That same year, Konchalovsky's teacher, the beloved department head professor Leonid Efremovich Golubinin, passed away. Konchalovsky described the changes that took place in the department as a result: "N.F. Golubov was named as Golubinin's replacement. This was a man from a different planet with much different standards and his initial period at the department was very difficult, to the point that he seemed to be a doctor from an entirely different specialty. The one good

³ After V. D. Shervinsky retired, he remained honorary director of the clinic.



Fig. 4. Privat-docent of Moscow University, M.P. Konchalovsky (1910s).

thing was that he gave me and E.E. Fromgold complete independence. Within five years I was in charge of half of the department and E.E. was in charge of the other" [3].

Professor of the hospital therapy clinic of the Moscow Higher Courses for Women

After the Great October Socialist Revolution, a new stage began in Konchalovsky's life. According to his student and biographer G.P. Shultsev (1975), "M.P. Konchalovsky, along with several other prominent Soviet healthcare professionals in the first few

years after the Great October Socialist Revolution, was a founder of the Soviet school of therapy.

An enormous clinical talent, his erudition and professional work were instrumental in the foundation of the Soviet medical system..." [5].

In 1918, Konchalovsky was chosen to be the professor of the hospital therapy clinic of the Moscow Higher Courses for Women⁴. In the clinic, in his own words, "it was like stepping into a kingdom of women, with one male assistant, R.M. Obakevich. All the other residents and assistants were women. All of the students were women as well" [3].

It was at this point that Konchalovsky began to cultivate his organizational abilities, as the former private Linskerov residence at Krasnye Vorota which housed the clinic became unsuitable for carrying out clinical functions. Konchalovsky believed that laboratories with specialized equipment, workrooms, and an up-to-date auditorium were necessary for the clinic. The current clinic's tight quarters and small, stuffy auditorium were not up to Konchalovsky's standards. The advantage of the new location, Konchalovsky thought, was the well-

⁴ From 1919 to 1929 it was known as The 2nd MSU and later as The 2nd Moscow Medical Institute. It is currently called the N.I. Pirogov Russian National Medical Research Institute.

furnished laboratory and the ability to transfer more interesting patients from the Basmann Hospital to the clinic. Konchalovsky enlisted the aid of People's Commissar for Health of the RSFSR N.A. Semashko, who ordered the clinic to be moved to the former Pavlovsky Hospital⁵ and supplied with all necessary equipment. Konchalovsky himself looked for the new books and instruments and purchased equipment. By autumn of 1919, he was ready to move the whole institution to its new location. However, another move soon became necessary: an x-ray machine had been acquired from abroad and it seemed wrong to install the new machine in the old building. So, in autumn of 1922 the hospital therapy clinic of The 2nd MSU was moved to the former Medvednikov Hospital on Bolshaya Kaluzhskaya Street.

Under Konchalovsky's leadership, both pedagogical and research work was conducted at the clinic. Clinic staff regularly presented papers at the Therapy Society and introduced new and progressive methods of diagnosis and treatment (Shilling's leukocyte count formula, duodenal intubation, administration of drugs via spinal canal, insulin therapy, etc.). The 2nd MSU hospital therapy clinic under Konchalovsky was one of the first in the country to perform electrocardiographic studies of myocardial infarction [6].

Konchalovsky's treatment philosophy began to take shape during this period. Of this time he writes, "Little by little, my own conception of disease began to change. Anatomical damage to the organ does not in itself reflect the whole picture of the disease, as a more accurate representation of disease should include patterns of physiological and anatomical relationships between organs and systems and the effect of substitutive and compensatory factors. Thus the concept of the syndrome develops... My clinical ideas further evolved as my understanding of the importance of diagnosis developed. Diagnosis, which relies on dynamic clinical trends, is not a stable concept. It is always moving and changing..." [3]. Konchalovsky understood the syndrome to be the body's reaction to the characteristic combination of damage to organs and systems and believed that a syndrome itself should be classified as a disease.

In 1923, Konchalovsky became the head of the Moscow Therapy Society and in the same

⁵ Currently City Clinical Hospital No.4 (Pavlovskaya Ulitsa [Street], 25).

year founded the journal *Therapy Archive* with G.F. Lang (Konchalovsky remained its managing editor until the end of his life). All of this, of course, testifies to Konchalovsky's growing professional authority.

Konchalovsky characterized this period of his life in the following way: "The clinic was well-equipped and had a very good X-ray machine, biochemical laboratory, electrocardiography machine, and, most importantly, a large, friendly staff. On the Council of Professors I enjoyed influence and respect, I was the dean, a member of the board, and I was chosen to be the university's deputy at the Moscow Soviet..." [3].

Department head of the faculty therapy clinic of Moscow University

From 1929 until the end of his life, Konchalovsky headed his "home" faculty therapy clinic at Moscow University⁶. He describes the first few years at the clinic in the following way: "...My voice began to sound more and more confident. This confidence grew stronger as my clinical experience increased and as my views on disease matured. In fact, the whole institution was growing stronger. I made it a rule not to constrain the freedom of my colleagues and to support their endeavors, and I always tried to emphasize and even to embellish their positive aspects... The clinic already had five assistants from the previous team and they were well-trained. They were E.M. Tareev, V.N. Smotrov, S.A. Pospelov, S.A. Gilyarovsky, and radiologist A.E. Uspensky... So my participation on this team was easy and pleasant..." [3].

Konchalovsky's scientific works – he was, after all, a well-known therapist and the author of 220 published works [7] – were devoted to a wide range of issues in internal medicine and related fields, and he is often called the father of Soviet rheumatology, gastroenterology, and balneology⁷. As E.M. Tareev pointed out, "the main periods

⁶ Subsequently called The first Moscow Medical Institute, Moscow Medical Academy; currently called I.M. Sechenov First MSMU.

⁷ A detailed analysis of Konchalovsky's scientific legacy and clinical school was undertaken by V.I. Borodulin and A.V. Topolyanskiy in their work published in 2015 in the journal *History of Medicine* [8]. For this reason we will limit our list of his works to those presented at conferences and congresses (table 1).

Table 1. Konchalovsky's papers presented at meetings, congresses, and conferences

Year	Name of Paper	Name of Forum and Location
1909	On the clinical significance of new physiological facts about gastric digestion	1st Union of Russian Therapists, Moscow
1924	On pulmonary suppuration and the circumstances for providing surgical treatment.	7th Union of Russian Therapists, Moscow
1925	Functional diagnostics of the liver	8th Union of Russian Therapists, Leningrad
1927	On the importance of compensatory and protective factors in the clinic	Conference of the Institute of Labor Hygiene and Occupational Diseases, Moscow
1928	Clinical characteristics of hepatolienal syndrome	10th Union of Russian Therapists, Leningrad
1928	Treatment of Graves' Disease	10th Union of Russian Therapists, Leningrad
1930	Lung cancer clinic	Cancer Conference, Moscow
1931	Lung tumors	3rd Ukrainian Union of Therapists, Kiev
1932	On the early signs of chronic rheumatism	International Union of Rheumatologists, Paris
1932	Rheumatism and Allergy	All-union Conference on Rheumatism, Moscow
1934	Clinic of acute rheumatism	International Anti-rheumatism Congress, Moscow
1936	Rheumatism – a social disease	Scientific Spa Medicine Union, Moscow

of Maxim Petrovich's work on internal pathology are characterized by presentations at congresses and conferences, one after another in an impressive succession" [9] (see table 1).

According to N.M. Konchalovskaya (Maxim Konchalovsky's daughter), "he was a tall, slightly stooped man, always towering over everybody. He had kind, tender hands which seemed always ready to embrace somebody. His head was large and heavy. Maxim Petrovich began balding at an early age and for the second half of his life he shaved it completely. He always had freshly shaven cheeks, a well-maintained beard, and a small moustache... His all-around agreeable appearance complemented his surprisingly majestic and calm demeanor..." The professor's impressive and attractive appearance (fig. 5), his majestic, calm, and confident

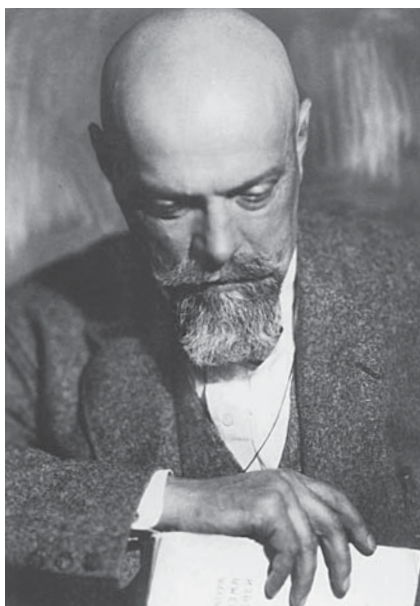


Fig. 5. Professor M.P. Konchalovsky.

demeanor, his natural charm and constant kindness attracted both doctors and patients; he considered each patient to be a "precious gift to the clinic". Among the people who turned to him for help were political figures (including L.D. Trotsky and N.K. Krupskaya), Patriarch Tikhon, P.A. Kropotkin, and numerous famous actors (K.S. Stanislavsky, V.I. Kachalov, V.I. Nemirovich, V.N. Pashennaya, etc.), writers, and others.

According to N.M. Konchalovskaya and P.V. Konchalovsky, his rounds were always entertaining: "And down the hall moved the procession... Maxim Petrovich towering over all (his height was 190cm) in his starched, white smock, surrounded by a crowd of doctors. Maxim Petrovich sits on the bed of each patient, carefully listens to the attending's analysis, asks questions to the doctor

and patient, examines each patient, offers words of comfort, reassures them, and sometimes cracks a joke. Before he leaves the ward he is “caught” by relatives, for whom he also finds comforting words. Even in the most hopeless of situations, people came away with a sense of relief after talking to him” [10].

His firmly established medical philosophy allowed Konchalovsky to get to the essence of a disease. According to G.P. Shultsev, he “could always identify the most important aspects of an illness – the most relevant symptoms he grouped into threes with symptom complexes and syndromes. You could say that he “painted the disease in broad strokes”, which had to be viewed from a certain distance to take in the illness (patient) as a whole, to understand it, to link all aspects together, and then to narrow everything down the most relevant details and questions” [2].

Konchalovsky was also a great teacher. According to E.M. Tareev, his lectures are in the same class as those of G.A. Zakharyin,

S.P. Botkin, A.A. Ostroumov, S.S. Zimnitsky, and other outstanding Russian therapists. One of Maxim Petrovich’s most famous students characterized his lectures in this way: “Gentleness and humaneness in his relationship with patients, signs of empathy, and a sincere desire to help people could be heard in every sentence of his lectures – this is the pedagogical standard that was used and will always be used to teach students and doctors” [11]. In his clinical lectures he would analyze the case history of an actual patient; a few remarks on questions of theory (e.g. on the course of illnesses or mistakes in diagnosis) could be done in the absence of a patient, but the analysis of clinical cases were always necessary. He prepared his lectures thoroughly and carefully: he read the latest scientific papers (often in French), carefully considered his lecture materials and evaluated the available illustrations, examined the patient who was to be presented the morning of his lecture, and rehearsed with his colleagues his presentation of the case history: “Reading a lecture was for him a particularly creative

Table 2. M.P. Konchalovsky’s professional and social activity

Years	Activity
1894–1899	Student in the medical faculty of Moscow University
1899–1905	Extern in the faculty therapy clinic of Moscow University
1905–1912	Assistant in the faculty therapy clinic of Moscow University
1912–1918	Privat-docent in the faculty therapy clinic of Moscow University
1918–1929	Head of the hospital therapy clinic of the Moscow Higher Courses for Women (The 2nd MSU)
1923–1942	Managing editor of the journal Therapy Archive
1929–1942	Head of the faculty therapy clinic of Moscow University
1923–1931, 1938–1942	Chairman of the Moscow Therapy Society
1927–1931	Consultant at the V.A. Obukh Institute of Labor Hygiene and Occupational Diseases
From 1928	Chairman of the Russian Anti-Rheumatism Committee
1928–1942	Deputy director of the A.A. Bogdanov Institute of Blood Transfusion
1929–1942	Department head of the faculty therapy clinic of Moscow University
From 1931	Chairman of the Russian Therapy Society
1933–1942	Head of the therapy clinic of the Russian Institute of Experimental Medicine
From 1934	Member of the Higher Qualification Commission and Chairman of the Subcommittee for Therapy Departments

act. His clinical illustrations and explanations presented in the auditorium stayed in people's memories forever, and his frequent digressions and associations made connections between topics more memorable. He had excellent speaking skills and diction. Maxim Petrovich's lectures were informative not only for students but for doctors. A skilled orator and wonderful storyteller, M.P. Konchalovsky shared his great experience, drew insightful comparisons, and identified historical parallels" [10]. There was no need to worry about attendance in his lectures, as the auditorium was always full and there were not only students but practicing doctors as well.

Konchalovsky used his rich pedagogical experience to write a book: in 1933 he published a guide for students and doctors called *Clinical Internal Medicine* (in 1939 it was re-edited and published as a therapy textbook), and in 1935 his clinical lectures were published (and they were reissued several times in subsequent years).

Konchalovsky's thorough medical and pedagogical work were successfully combined with an active social life (table 2): "...He was literally torn to pieces, which was the result of his perfectionism, enormous thirst for activity, wholehearted love for the clinical profession, and astounding work ethic" [10].

It seems as if Konchalovsky's most characteristic trait was identified by E.M. Tareev: "...He was always busy and accomplishing so much, yet at the same time he was always unhurried, possessing a certain inner calm, extremely accessible, attentive to others (which made him popular with patients), yet never getting in the way of their endeavors, a believer in the power of educa-

tion through working on a clinical team, having knowledge of the entire medical world and

During the Great Patriotic War, Konchalovsky did not want to leave besieged Moscow, but "after a sharp official reprimand" (his daughter Nina Maximovna Konchalovskaya mentions a late night phone call from People's Commissar of Health of the USSR G.A. Miterev) he was forced to evacuate Moscow on the 4th of December 1941 and head for Kuybyshev. There he served as a consultant at the hospital and worked on his memoir. The change in climate and environment had a negative effect on his health and he suffered from arterial hypertension. According to E.M. Tareev, "the forced interruption of his pedagogical work, his separation from his clinical home, and the disruption of his normal routine were some of the terrible effects of the war and hastened his death" [11]. In 1942, Konchalovsky returned to Moscow and began to work at the clinic (lectures, rounds) and continued examining patients, but on the 29th of November, 1942, he suddenly died. He is buried at Novodevichy Cemetery.

Konchalovsky left behind him a rich scientific legacy and a major clinical school of thought. A selection of his works were published posthumously and serve as a literary memorial to his life: a number of figures took part in editing the book, including E.M. Tareev, S.A. Gilyarevsky, G.P. Shultsev, N.M. Konchalovskaya, and Z.A. Bondar. At the end of the introduction, E.M. Tareev writes that, in participating in the publication of this book, Maxim Petrovich's students wanted to once again honor the memory of their beloved teacher, "whose voice will ring out with renewed strength to the new generation of clinicians and doctors".

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