CONTENTS

GENERAL ASPECTS OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF MEDICINE

Herophilus and vivisection: a re-appraisal ................................. 5
J. Ganz

HISTORY OF MEDICAL DISCIPLINES

Philippe Ricord – prominent venereologist of the XIX century ............... 13
K.A. Pashkov, M.S. Betekhtin

Development of national system of pharmaceutical education
in 1920–1930: Moscow medico-pharmaceutical combine ....................... 18
M.S. Sergeeva

FROM THE HISTORY OF HEALTHCARE

Zemstvo district medicine and charity in Russia .......................... 29
L.E. Gorelova, T.I. Surovtseva

The formation of factory legislation on health protection in Europe
and Russia in the 19th to early 20th centuries ............................... 35
I.V. Karpenko

FROM THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN MEDICINE

Stages of formation and further development of domestic cardiology. Part 1 .... 40
V.I. Borodulin, S.P. Glyantsev, A.V. Topolianskiy

On the Biography of Professor and Psychiatrist Anatoly Kotsovsky (1864–1937) .... 48
K.K. Vasylyev, Yu.K. Vasylyev

Professor of surgery at the University of Moscow I.P. Aleksinsky:
his life and work in Russia and in emigration ................................. 55
O.A. Trefilova, I.A. Rozanov

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Some evidence of the worship of Apollo Physician (Ietroos)
in ancient Greece and the Black Sea Coast ................................... 73
E.S. Naumova

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Physiological and pathophysiological aspects in Herophilus writings ............. 81
L.D. Maltseva

SOURCE

Continuity in the views of Hippocrates and Galen on the nature
of the human body ............................................................ 89
D.A. Balalykin
Zemstvo district medicine and charity in Russia

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As a result of zemstvo district reforms of 1864, Russia saw the formation of zemstvo district medicine, which played an important role in improving the people's health. The main objectives of zemstvo district medicine were fighting epidemics, providing vaccinations, and obstetrical and medical help. The organization of medical care was costly. Charity played a huge role. Health issues occupied a prominent place among philanthropists' activities. Three-quarters of zemstvo medicine's funding came from private sources, among which funding from merchants took first place. Members of the nobility played a leading role in the development of zemstvo district medicine. Prominent cultural figures held charity concerts in aid of zemstvo district hospitals. Philanthropy provided substantial support for health care and charity institutions (construction and maintenance of hospitals, shelters for the disabled, the elderly and orphans).

Keywords: philanthropy, zemstvo district medicine, charities, shelters, patrons

The formation in Russia of zemstvo district medicine, which played an important role in improving "the people's health," was a result of the zemstvo reforms of 1864. The main objectives of zemstvo medicine were fighting epidemics, providing vaccinations, obstetrical and medical help. The organization of medical care was costly. Education and rural medicine at the turn of the 19th to 20th century were the main items of expenditure in zemstvo district budgets. For example, the expenditures on care provision and "the people's health" in 1871 amounted to 10 percent of the zemstvo district budget expenditure, and in 1875 – 28.5 percent. In 1870 zemstvo districts spent 2.5 million rubles on zemstvo medicine, while in 1912 the sum was 57.7 million rubles. [1, p. 206] However, public funds were not sufficient, so the bulk of the costs were covered by donations. Charity levels reached impressive scales at the turn of the 19th to 20th century.

The creation of charitable societies and institutions is connected with different periods in the history of the Russian state. However, the beginning of a significant increase in the number of charities can be considered to have started in 1861: 95 percent of all charitable societies and 82 percent of all charitable institutions that existed in Russia by the end of the 19th century were founded between 1861 and 1899. The largest number was created in the 1890s. In 1889-1899, 3,504 charitable societies and institutions were created [2, p. 9], and by the beginning of the 20th century they totaled 14,864 in number (of which one-third was concentrated in provincial and regional cities, while the rest were in the county towns and other settlements). The upward growth trend in charitable societies and institutions in Russia increased at the beginning of the 20th century. The following example is very significant.

In the department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, by 1910 there were 6,616 institutions. [3, p. 8] Documents show that the state treasury funds covered a total of 25 percent of costs and 75 percent of funds were raised through charity.

According to the digest "Charities of the Russian Empire," there were 806 charitable institutions providing direct medical care in the Russian Empire, 45 of which were for children's medical care and 761 for adults. The years 1881-1899 were the most important period for the development of charitable and medical institutions. It was during this time that approximately 71 percent of all existing medical institutions for children and 56.7 percent of those for adults were founded. In 1898 alone, 3,177,032 people used these charitable institutions. [2, p. 32]
Charitable and medical institutions possessed real estate worth 18,490,812 rubles and capital worth 13,744,852 rubles; as such their total property was valued at 32,235,664 rubles. [2, p. 33] The institutions' income in 1898 amounted to 4,229,144 rubles and costs were 4,105,211 rubles (an average of 1.3 rubles per recipient). [2, p. 34]

By the end of the 19th century a system to encourage philanthropy was developed by the state. For example, merchants, engaged in charity, were bestowed nobility status, they were awarded medals, given the rank of councilor of state, which gave the right to be called "Your Excellency."

Health issues occupied a special place in philanthropists' activities. About 5,000 charitable societies and more than 6,000 charitable bequests existed in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century — three-quarters were funded from private sources, among which merchants' funding occupied first place. [4, p. 120] These societies' activities were based on the idea of serving charitable causes. By the end of the 19th century in Russia, charities' capital amounted to more than 50 million rubles. At the first congress of Russian leaders of public and private charities, which took place in 1910 in St. Petersburg (attended by delegates from charities), it was stated that one-sixth of the zemstvo district medicine budget was provided for by zemstvo district government funding and the rest was made up from donations. [3, p. 388]

Members of the nobility played a leading role in the development of zemstvo medicine. Back in 1872 in the village of Voronovo in the Podolsk district of the Moscow province, a hospital opened with funding from Prince P.P. Golenishchev-Kutuzov-Tolstoy. A doctor who had just prior graduated from Moscow University was invited to work there. Later the Podolsk district council decided to build a new hospital. Land (about two hectares) was donated by a local landowner, Podolsk zemstvo district assembly council member Count S.D. Sheremetev. In October 1889, a new hospital, built using a corridor-pavilion system proposed by N.I. Pirogov (believed at the time to be the most convenient), was opened. [5, p. 24-25]

Governorate council member M. I. Somov not only "took over supervision" of the construction of Seredinsky Hospital, but "personally donated himself some much-needed things for it." [6, p. 45]

When the Ruza zemstvo district assembly allocated 4,000 rubles to building the clinic, meeting chairman V.A. Sheremetev "stated a willingness to donate the necessary amount of land for the hospital estate at the village of Pokrovsky." [6, p. 46]

In 1882 landowner K.V. Rukavishnikov "told the chairman of the provincial council of his desire for the outpatients' hospital that he had organized at his own country house to be transferred to the provincial zemstvo with an annual contribution of 2,000 rubles, which he would spend on the hospital." [6, p. 54] The transfer took place on November 1 of the same year. In 1883, E.N. Rukavishnikova provided the following statement to the Sanitary Commission of the Moscow Province Zemstvo: "I humbly propose for approval by the provincial zemstvo assembly, the addition of the following to the agreement between myself and the council for the upkeep of the Grachevsky Hospital: 1) I give full ownership, to the Moscow zemstvo district, of unused Chesnovka land belonging to me near my Grachevka estate for the construction of a hospital with permanent beds and outpatient clinics; 2) I will provide 10,000 rubles as a grant for the construction of the zemstvo hospital; 3) the requirement for me to provide 2,000 rubles for the maintenance of the hospital still remains, and I give myself the right to substitute an annual contribution payment of reserve capital of 40,000 rubles in silver ... "* The Commission decided to express its gratitude to Rukavishnikova, asking her to assume the title of matron and bestowing her surname on the hospital. [6, p. 58-59]


Let's consider examples of charity from specific charitable societies at individual hospitals in

* Reproduced with preservation of the original (the author's) spelling.
different provinces. The first charitable institution founded on private funds in the Tomsk province appeared in 1845 (the Mariinsky Orphanage). Charity in Tomsk saw significant success at the end of the 19th century. Unlike other cities in Siberia, where charities were created with very large donations from individual local rich people (for example, most Irkutsk charities), in the Tomsk province very few charities were created at the expense of one person (the Royal Shelter, the Mariinsky Shelter in Barnaul, the Pushnikovs' impoverished and orphaned children's shelter and the Royal Poorhouse), and most charities and institutions that emerged were funded on the donations of many people: wealthy individuals, the middle-class and the poor. By the end of the 19th century, 19 charities, eight shelters, 14 almshouses, seven hospitals and clinics, four night shelters and a children's home operated in Tomsk province. The capital funds of all the charitable societies and institutions reached a significant amount — 1,453,630 rubles; 165,000 rubles was spent on charity annually. [9. 2–3]

In the 1890s, charities were created at zemstvo district hospitals of the Moscow province.

The charitable society at Mytishinskaya Hospital in the Moscow province was created in 1894. Its charter was significantly different from the charters of charities at other hospitals: its goal was not only considered to be taking care of individual hospital patients, but also looking after the welfare of the entire medical district (improvement of the health situation in general, assistance to needy patients and their families). During a 10-year accounting period, the society's funding increased: On January 1, 1897, its funds consisted of just 790 rubles and 9 1/4 kopecks. In five years' time (January 1, 1902) — it was 3,809 rubles and 36 kopecks, and by January 1, 1906, the society's capital increased to 5,667 rubles and 76 kopecks. The society's spending also progressively increased: in 1896 it spent just 50 rubles and 28 kopecks. Over the next five years — 995 rubles and 50 kopecks, and from 1902-1905 the total of all funds spent was 1,347 rubles and 47 kopecks. [10, p. 13]

The November 14, 1902 report from the Mytishinskaya Hospital charitable society's general meeting shows that via Dr. D.I. Orlov, the society received cash donations to the amount of 1,107 rubles and 82 kopecks for the creation of a Mytishinskaya Hospital nursery for children of women who were staying in the hospital (N.S. Perlov brought in 259 rubles in 1901 and 171 rubles in 1902). [11, p. 8] Since Mytischinskaya Hospital was located along a pilgrims' path on the way to the Holy Trinity-Sergius Lavra, the hospital's charity fund allocated money for paramedics to assist sick pilgrims on the road.

Well-known doctors also engaged in charity and made significant contributions to the development of zemstvo district medicine. G.A. Abrikosov and P.A. Minakov were members of the charity society at the Mytishinskaya Hospital in the Moscow zemstvo county — their donations maintained several hospital beds.

In 1903, at the initiative of the district hospital doctors M.S. Rossolimo, G.I. Rossolimo and others, a charitable society was founded at the Zvenigorod zemstvo district hospital (in the Moscow province), which aimed to help poor patients.

Representatives of all classes were on registers of charitable societies at zemstvo district hospitals. For example, members of the charitable society at the Zvenigorod zemstvo hospital included Prince A.V. Golitsyn, Princess L.V. Golitsyn, Countess A.L. Tolstaya, Count A.G. Grab, merchant
of the first guild G. S. Popov and his daughter M.G. Popova. Their donations to the zemstvo district hospital provided for the opening of a shelter for disadvantaged children, which later was named after A.P. Chekhov.

It the Zvenigorod zemstvo district, besides the charitable society at the Zvenigorod district hospital, there was a charitable society at the Perkhushkovskaya rural hospital. According to the Perkhushkovskaya society's detailed account for 1905, the society's annual spending was 2,191 rubles and 20 kopecks. The report shows figures for several prior years, indicating that the activities of the society were increasing every year. The charitable society at Zvenigorod hospital only provided assistance in the form of grants to the needy. In 1904, a total of 319 rubles and 70 kopecks was spent, and in 1905 – 721 rubles and 45 kopecks. [12. 2]

The charitable society at the Smolensk zemstvo district hospital was organized in 1895. Among its founders was the famous philanthropist Princess M.K. Tenisheva. During the year in which the society was organized, she gave 500 rubles to the hospital. The following year, as a member of the charitable society, the princess donated 1,000 rubles to a children's home (this was one of the largest contributions from a members of the charitable society). Every year, up to 1911, the princess took part in a charity raffle (the money raised was spent on the hospital). Prince and Princess Tenishev owned several estates, at which their funds were used to establish schools, colleges and hospitals. At the Bezhitsa estate in Bryansk county of Orel province, they built a school and a hospital and allocated capital (more than 200,000 rubles) for their maintenance. In the Orel province, Prince Tenishev's example was followed by many. For example, 20,000 rubles was left to charity in the will of honorary citizen Goldenberg [13. 61]; the money was donated in the name of Princess Tenisheva and used for the maintenance of schools and rural hospitals. In 1893, Prince Tenishev purchased an estate in Talashkino, in the Smolensk province, which over the years had been visited by the artists Repin, A. Benois, K. Korovin, M. Vrubel, the Roerich family and other artists who during their lives were not indifferent to charitable causes. A rural hospital, which was fully funded by Prince and Princess Tenisheva, was founded in Talashkino. In August 1914, after the start of World War I, Princess Tenisheva founded a hospital in Smolensk at her own expense, for which medical equipment and an X-ray machine were sent from St. Petersburg. For transportation of the wounded, the princess donated her car, and she turned over the entire first floor of her house in Smolensk for use as a military hospital. The hospital was equipped with an operating room and two wards for 10 people. Doctors were invited, including the well-known female surgeon N.V. Sergeevskaya and Moscow University student A.G. Grzhibovsky. Nicholas II visited the infirmary on November 20, 1914. He walked around the ward, graciously talked with the wounded and handed them awards, and visited the operating room, where he was shown fragments of shells removed during an operation. The Smolensky Vestnik newspaper noted that the emperor was satisfied. [13, p. 280]

Prominent cultural figures took part in helping zemstvo district hospitals (they held charity concerts). For example, E.I. Zbrueva, a well-known singer from the Imperial Opera, organized a series of concerts in 1912 and raised money for the Zvenigorod zemstvo district eye clinic.

Thus, we can conclude that charity provided substantial support for the development of zemstvo district medicine (building and maintaining hospitals, homes for the disabled, elderly and orphans). Sources indicate that charitable funding provided three-quarters of the funding for zemstvo district medicine. These days, when the topic of philanthropy in society is more important that ever, it is necessary to study this history, as attitudes to charity reflect not only on the economic state but also the spiritual level of society. Charity is of great educational value, contributes to the awakening of people's compassion and responsibility for what happens in this world.
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Received: 01.04.14

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