

The Western concept of medical professionalism in the Russian realities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

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Abstract. The article describes research on the application of the Anglo-American concept of professionalism to the medical history of pre-revolutionary Russia (1856–1917). Approaches to the study of professions in the UK and the US are described, Western literature's views are presented, in which the history of pre-revolutionary Russian medicine has been studied in line with the concept of professionalism, the experience of its application in relation to the medical history of pre-revolutionary Russia is discussed, the prospects for the use of this concept in relation to the country's history of medicine is assessed as well. The concept of professionalism is widespread in English-language literature, dedicated to the profession of medicine. Regardless of the attitude towards it, modern scholars in their study of the original or translated English-language literature must take into account differences in theoretical approaches to the problem of professions. Most Western scholars who have studied the history of medicine in Russia have adhered to the tradition of describing Russian doctors of the second half of the 19th century and early 20th centuries in terms of the concept of professionalization. An analysis of Russian history of medicine with the use of the concept of professionalism does not give obvious advantages and leads to significant distortions (phenomena closer to the Anglo-American experience are studied in more detail).

For local historians of medicine, the concept of professionalism is not relevant, since Russia developed a tradition for research of professional medical work based on the study of medical education and the scientific and social activities of doctors. Given the differences in professional bodies of doctors in the West and in Russia, perhaps there are prospects for the analysis of individual elements such as the concept of professionalization in terms of expert knowledge, autonomy (self-regulation), the activity of medical associations, commitment to public service, but not the whole paradigm in its entirety. In carrying out comparative studies of the historical aspects of the formation of the medical profession in the West and in Russia, understanding of the concept of professionalism is required.

Keywords: physicians, Russia, profession, concept of professionalism, history of healthcare, history of medicine, comparative analysis

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the Western concept of “profession” and “professionalism” has been widely used in Russian sociology, including the sociology of medicine. However, there are differences between the interpretations of professionalism inherited from Soviet social science and those which are found in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the sociology of professions. Moreover, these differences are still not clear to the scientific community outside of sociology [1]. If the definition of profession in English-language sociological reference books begins with the fact that this is an occupation of the middle class,

characterized by a high level of technical and intellectual competence, in the Russian language the term profession often refers to “a kind of work, occupation, that requires certain training and is a regular source of income” [2, p. 589].

Due to difficulties extrapolating Western theoretical constructs in the Russian and Soviet reality, the domestic scientific literature on the professionalization of physicians is not very extensive. The most active in this area are medical sociologists who have studied American history of the discipline [3]. In research conducted by the Higher School of Economics [4; 5] and the Institute of Sociology at the Russian Academy of Sciences [6–8], attempts were made to apply this concept to modern Russian health care.

In using the Anglo-Saxon concept of the profession in the Russian reality, it is noteworthy

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that domestic researchers rarely pay attention to the development of this field in relation to the history of professions in prerevolutionary Russia. Meanwhile, Western authors emphasize the need to take into account the national, social, political and historical context and have some experience in this.

The purpose of this article is to explore the development of themes of the professionalization of physicians in the history of medicine in prerevolutionary Russia in Western scientific literature and assess the prospects for the use of this concept in relation to the country's history of medicine. Approaches to the study of professions in the UK and the US are described, views are presented of Western authors who have studied the medical history of prerevolutionary Russia in line with the concept of professionalism, and the experience of applying the concept of professionalism in relation to the medical history of prerevolutionary Russia is analyzed as well.

The chronological scope of the study – from 1856 to 1917 – is due to Western historical tradition, according to which the beginning of the professionalization process in Russia belongs to the beginning of the reign of Alexander II, and the end is connected with the fall of the Provisional Government in October 1917. It should be noted that on various aspects of the history of the medical industry in Russia there is an extensive historiography, and coverage of this whole body of domestic work on this subject was not included in this article.

Approaches to the study of professions in the UK and the US

Early researchers of professions in the UK and the US have used, as a rule, a non-critical approach. The existence of professions is accepted by them as part of the natural order of things, and professional societies are portrayed as the elite of society, possessing elevated values [9]. Of the British works on professionalism that are well-known to Russian readers, first and foremost is Thomas Humphrey Marshall's publication [10]. An overview of British work on the sociology of professions, including medical professions, was conducted in the postwar period by R.N. Abramov [11].

Eliot Freidson and Konrad Jarusch, having conducted a review of research on professions in the

United States, drew a conclusion on the transition from a non-critical (or neutral) understanding of professions to a deeper, comparative and socio-historical-based perspective [12–14]. Despite the healthy skepticism of the works of some social critics in the United States, the establishment of the dominant paradigm in the field of professions contributed to the functionalist approach of Talcott Parsons, according to which a profession is considered ethically-motivated and service-oriented.

The US medical education reformer Abraham Flexner in 1915 proposed a list of attributes that are supposedly required to meet the ideal example of a professional: involvement in intellectual activity, which implies individual responsibility; drawing upon science and research for practical purposes; the application of knowledge through technology, acquired through education; self-organization; altruistic motivation; the presence of a professional identity [1].

Despite American researchers' different points of view on the motives and implementation of professional programs, functionalists and radical critics of the concept of professionalism reached a certain consensus in the definition of "profession". The most reputable author in this field, E. Freidson, proposed the following definition: "I use the word '*profession*' for a type of activity in which a person controls his or her work, organized by a certain set of institutions supported in part by particular ideologies of expertise and services. I use the word '*professionalism*' for an ideology and a certain set of institutions" [12, p. 10]. This model is based on the study of the Anglo-American experience. In our work, the English word "*professionals*" is used to refer to performers of intellectual labor, "white collar workers" is translated not word for word, but as "specialists".

German medical historian Andreas Renner – a representative of the continental philosophy of science, relating critically to the concept of professionalism – understood professionalization as a process specifically leading to the domination of the market by one professional group (mostly university graduates), the knowledge and skills of whom will be in demand as a special public interest and provided by the state. Therefore, in his opinion, professionalization is aimed at improving social status and independence, providing control over other professional groups,

and, ultimately, leads to a monopoly in the practical implementation of certain activities, as well as training [15, p. 217].

Traditionally, biographies of prominent physicians are studied in the history of medicine. In this context, the study of professionalization takes into consideration typical examples of success in and of themselves, and how these examples are typical for the profession. If the previous history of medicine saw the rise of doctors due to medical necessity, the professionalization concept sees the reasons for this in power relations, social processes and economic interests. Based on sociological theory, the relatively high level of abstraction of this argument has the advantage that it makes a review of the typicality and specificity of the national development of professions in an international context possible as is their comparison with other professions. Studies in the history of medical professionalization, according to A. Renner, developed in three directions, inevitably modifying conclusions in relation to the present model. First, other medical specializations have undergone a deeper study of their social history; secondly, professionalization has been studied as a strategy of self-representation in professional competition; thirdly, the basis for the rise of doctors dates back to the early modern times, namely to the era when there could no longer be a question of the greater superiority of university medicine over folk and traditional medicine [15].

Thus, the concept of professionalism, if not dominating, then in any case, is very widespread in the English-language literature on the medical profession. Regardless of the acceptance or rejection of it, modern scholars in their study of the original or translated English-language literature must take into account differences in theoretical approaches to the problem of professions.

The development of the medical profession in Russia in the framework of the professionalization paradigm

Foreign works on the history of the professionalism of Russian doctors is scant and they can be sequentially placed in historical periods. In John Alexander's book on the 18th century plague in Russia, the doctor's class takes a secondary role [16], while Nancy Frieden's monograph is directly dedicated to the professionalization of Russian

doctors in the second half of the 19th century [17]. Frieden's work is continued directly in the research of John Hutchinson, who studied the beginning of 20th century in Russia in detail [18; 19]. The Pirogov Society's work is dedicated to Peter Krug's thesis. In addition to doctors in English historiography, the most developed medical profession in terms of professionalization was that of paramedics [20; 21]. Other medical profession in Russia, for example, dentists, pharmacists and midwives, were not analyzed in the framework of the concept of professionalism.

From the point of view of Western scholars, the conditions for the development of professions in the Anglo-American understanding of the word in Russia appeared only during the reign of Alexander II (in the era of the Great Reforms). In this period, elements such as higher education, intra-group communication, specialty publishing and professional associations are treated as integral parts of the self-determination of specialists. The first such attempt was taken by doctors, lawyers and engineers, and was quickly continued among other professional groups. By the end of the 19th century, Western researchers found signs of commitment to professionalization among wide circles of Russian experts [22].

An integral component of profession in the paradigm of the professionalization concept was higher educated specialists and an education system that provided highly qualified university graduates. In the pre-reform period, the majority of those involved in specialized activities where in the service of various government departments. American researcher Frieden emphasized that a considerable number of doctors in the Russian Empire trained at the Imperial Medico-Surgical Academy and three-quarters of physicians were in the state service [17]. According to her, after the reforms of the 1860s, training at military schools was replaced by higher education in universities and specialized institutes. She further concludes that the Imperial Medico-Surgical Academy eventually ceased to be a major supplier of doctors, and the role of universities in training increased rapidly [17]. It should be noted that Frieden overestimates the importance of the reforms of the 1860s, as the reform of higher medical education in Russia began in the 1840s.

According to Western scholars, the quantitative increase in students was not as

important as the qualitative change in the field of higher education. The number of students and universities dramatically increased only at the end of the 19th century and the rate of national higher education for experts was established in the 1840-1860s. Higher education in Russia had become the main element in professional training [23].

In the context of the concept of professionalism, a lot of attention is paid to professional publications. By the end of the 1860s, professional journals had become an important part of the lives of most Russian professional communities. What's more, specialized newspapers and magazines existed before the era of the Great Reforms, but they were only issued by government departments and educational institutions. However, this does not mean that government publications lacked sharp polemics [24, p 46-48]. In the 1860s, the publication of periodicals by public organizations had become commonplace.

Following the logic of the concept of professionalism, which proposes "self-organization" and "autonomy" of specialists, Western researchers also subject the activities of medical societies in Russia to a thorough analysis. Improved means of communication, especially the construction of railways, contributed to the co-operation of experts, and international experience, according to foreign researchers, stimulated attempts to organize professional congresses. In the concept of professionalism, national congresses of experts are seen as a crucial symbol of professional development. According to Frieden, Russian doctors succeeded in preserving this form of organizational activity, as a result of an obvious need: to control devastating and ruinous epidemics, authorities were compelled to allow physicians to gather to exchange information and to develop public health protection measures. Doctors had been persistent in trying to hold congresses and with this aim had used a fair share of ingenuity to try to achieve it [17]. Specialists from other professional groups, such as engineers, had been less fortunate in their attempts.

Positive changes in education, communication and employment in Russia in the late 19th century, according to Hutchinson, created favorable conditions for the development of professions and specialists began to express their new identity in formal organizations. In this context, the holding of doctors' congresses

was the first step towards organizing permanent professional societies, such as those of their West European counterparts. The consolidation of doctors took place in several organizational forms. The Pirogov Society attracted the most attention from foreign as well as Russian researchers [18].

If state medicine has been and remains the focus of attention for local historians of medicine, American researchers have focused on private forms of health care and non-governmental organizations. According to these researchers, the emergence of private journals and congresses of independent experts was a reflection of the increasing importance of employment in the private sector. Changes in the nature of economic activity meant that after completing their education, specialists found themselves in an increasingly diversified world of professions where the state still remained the largest employer, but not the only player. The conditions for private medical practice appeared thanks to reforms in Russia, but a significant quantitative increase in the number of private medical institutions began only in the late 19th century [23, p. 13].

Western researchers have noted that members of the nursing and mid-level staff also considered their work as a profession and formulated a development program (although the formal features required for eligibility as a profession were not observed: paramedics, midwives, sisters of mercy and medical attendants did not have higher education). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the list of medical professionals who created their own societies expanded rapidly. This phenomenon, which occurred in Russia at the turn of the century, Western scholars regard as a phenomenon of professionalization, when activists of the fastest growing occupational groups were keen on finding their corporate identity, social status and often also the autonomy of free professions [21; 23].

Another important component of the concept of professionalism was a professional group's acquisition of authority. According to Harley Balzer, an editor of a book on the history of professionalization in Russia prior to 1917, the nature of the interaction between specialists and the state in Russia is fundamentally different from the experience not only of America and Great Britain but other countries of Western Europe. Balzer believes that the Russian intelligentsia

perceived the state as the biggest obstacle to the establishment of independent professional associations, and at the same time, as the most important partner in the implementation of a social and economic development program [23].

The ambivalent attitude of the Russian tsarist government to the professionalization movement reflects, according to American researcher Balzer, on the one hand, domestic opposition, and on the other – the desire to achieve the same economic and political power as in the societies in which professional life was more developed [23, p. 15]. It seemed that in order to compete with France, Britain and Germany, there was no choice but to give specialists more influence, of course, not as much as in Western Europe, but rather enough for Russia to catch up with the West. From Balzer's point of view, the professionalism movement in prerevolutionary Russia increasingly found support from government specialists, but their influence had never been great. It always ended with the return to an autocratic power of authority [23].

The unwillingness of autocracy to compromise led to the fact that prior to the 1905 revolution in Russia, the program of professional communities became more and more politicized. The events of 1905 were prominent in the history of Russian professions, including medical professions [25]. Until 1905, trade unions played a major role in the strike movement, but then public organizations joined the struggle against autocracy. It is interesting that Western scholars believe that the political radicalization of the specialists movement led to a missed chance for Russia to follow the path of Western Europe and the United States, at least in that part which concerns professions and the formation of the middle class [18]. In the context of this consideration, the problem becomes clear that Russian specialists were unable to consolidate strong professional associations or become influential members of the political system. Soviet historian of medicine I.D. Strashun, on the contrary, had a positive assessment of the events of 1905 and condemned the victory of the "business" approach of the Pirogov congresses over the next decade [25].

The altruistic motivation of specialists is one of the attributes of the concept of professionalization. According to Western scholars, experts in prerevolutionary Russia constantly emphasized

their uniqueness, and researchers who have studied the problem of professionalization also later wrote of this. Domestic historians of medicine believe that Russian doctors' strive for the common good, undertaking broad health measures in the 19th century, was one of the most important achievements of Russian medicine [26]. In the Western interpretation going beyond a purely professional and scientific interest is regarded as "a professional program to save Russia": professors claimed responsibility for higher education, doctors – for public health, lawyers – for the legal foundations of the state, etc. [23, p. 15–16].

In this way, there was formed and ingrained in the English-language literature a tradition to describe the activities of Russian physicians in the second half of the 19th century to early 20th centuries in terms of the concept of professionalization. Most Western scholars who have studied the history of Russian medicine adhere to this theory in their work. However, this view of the Russian history of medicine through the prism of an alien concept to Russian tradition inevitably leads to distortions and conclusions that are not well-founded.

Prospects for the use of the concept of professionalism in the study of the history of medicine

The main problem faced by authors conducting comparative studies on the issues of professionalism in Russia and Anglo-American countries is differences in fundamental terminologies. In Russian "professionalism" is a good command of one's profession and a "professional" is, respectively, a person who is engaged in any business as a specialist (opposed to an amateur) [27]. In the English-language literature "professionalism" is an entire concept and a set of social institutions that meet certain criteria. And these differences in terminology are important, not only for historical but also modern literature.

The application of the concept of professionalism in the history of Russian medicine is also associated with the following problems. Firstly, it is a very ideologized approach. According to the author of an influential concept of Orientalism, Edward Said, the Western academic study of the history of the Soviet Union, as a rule, is ideologically loaded and is more "political" than humanities [28, p. 19]. Editors of

the last major collection of articles on the history of medicine in Russia published in the West wrote that the history of Russian medicine was also influenced by ideology [29]. Secondly, even in the West, the one-sided use of the concept of professionalism in history raises questions. Scientists studying professions tend to exaggerate their role. This overemphasis on professions is obvious even to Western observers.

Another drawback of the concept of professionalism is its Eurocentrism, with the center of its influence falling in Anglo-Saxon countries. As noted by Renner, a Eurocentric bias is fraught with the danger of recklessly spreading a model developed for Western society to other regions of the world as a general criterion. In Anglo-Saxon countries, doctors with a university education were much more independent than, for example, in France, Germany and Russia, where the state as a leader and employer was involved in the definition of professional standards [15, p. 215]. Some researchers are tempted to consider the Anglo-American model of professionalization as a kind of “norm”, and other developments as a “deviation”. However, the study of professions in continental Europe shows, on the other hand, an absence of a single “unified” development path.

Models based on the British and American experience do not always lead to the correct formulation of issues concerning professions in continental Europe. In France, Central Europe and especially in Russia, the relationship between professions and the state have a completely different character, stemming from the state-run formal university education system. If the Anglo-American experience suggests independent professional groups looked for help from government authorities to strengthen their control over the training of specialists and their admission into practice, in continental Europe it was more the case that the state promoted and developed professions through special educational institutions. Taking into account the difference in each national context and each profession, such activities as the establishment of autonomous professional organizations, the raising of their social status, as well as the intervention of specialists in the educational process, inevitably causes tension between the state and the professionals [23, p. 8]. The model

of a civil servant as a bureaucrat-modernizer was a significant alternative to the model of free professional. In Russia, a similar concept was called “enlightened bureaucracy”.

Domestic researchers also attempt to use the Western approach to study the activity of Russian doctors before 1917, but here they expect to find stumbling blocks. For example, V.A. Mansurov and O.V. Yurchenko in their research on the prospects of professionalization of Russian doctors [8] assessed the differences between Russian and Western doctors in the late 19th century referring to the work of the famous American sovietologist Mark Field, published in 1957 [30]. It concludes that these differences were not significant. However, it should be noted that Field was not a historian of medicine and the history of Russia in the 19th century was not studied, and the later works of Frieden and Hutchinson showed convincingly that there were deep differences between doctors’ professional movements in the West and in Russia in the late 19th to the early 20th centuries.

Western researchers acknowledge that by loading professions and professionalism with various concepts, we do not understand history better. Professionalism is not the only thread stretching through the fabric of modern society that helps researchers unravel and understand historical material. Of course, this is an important phenomenon in Anglo-American culture, possibly one of the leading social processes in Western civilization during the 19th and 20th centuries. But it should be seen in the broader context of social history, otherwise it can distort the facts [23].

We should not forget that the concept of professionalism carries a certain ideological burden that can be demonstrated by the example of medical education – a key factor in the professionalism of doctors (no matter how the term professional is interpreted). In the early 20th century, the quality of doctors’ training in private medical schools in the United States led to a lot of complaints. To solve this problem, the American Medical Association (a public organization) appealed to the Carnegie Foundation (a public organization) to conduct an analysis and make recommendations. In 1912, the Federation of State Medical Boards (a non-state structure) was formed, which was agreed upon to accredit medical schools, a process that lasted 20 years

[31]. Thus, the reform of medical education in the United States was carried out by A. Flexner according to the concept of professionalism. In Russia, where most doctors were in the public service, training of doctors only took place in public universities, and control over education belonged to the state, so an analysis of this process in terms of the Anglo-American concept of professionalism is contrary to the internal logic of Russian public health.

Conclusion

Analysis of Russian history of medicine with the use of the concept of professionalism does not give obvious advantages, but it leads to considerable distortions when one phenomenon (closer to the Anglo-American experience) is studied in more detail, and others (typical for

Russia) are neglected. For Russian historians of medicine, the use of the concept of professionalism is not a pressing issue, since for many decades another tradition of research for physicians' professional activity was developed. Given the differences between professional bodies of doctors in the West and in Russia, perhaps there are prospects for the analysis of individual elements such as the concept of professionalization – expert knowledge, autonomy (self-regulation), the activity of medical associations, commitment to public service – but not the whole paradigm in its entirety. However, with comparative studies of historical aspects of the medical profession in the West and in Russia, as well as the analysis of Western research on the history of professions, an understanding the concept of professionalism is required.

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