ORGANISATION OF THE MEDICAL SERVICES IN THE U.S.S.R.

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A full State Medical Service has been in operation in Soviet Russia since 1918, when a People's Commissariat for Health was established to organise the provision of free, accessible and skilled medical aid to the whole population through the central and local organs of the Soviet State.

The People's Commissariat for Health of the U.S.S.R. not only directs preventive work and supervises all measures aimed at the improvement of the medical services, but exercises direct jurisdiction over certain medical institutions such as educational and scientific research institutes, health resorts, and enterprises engaged in the manufacture of medical instruments, equipment and drugs, which are of direct importance to the whole Union. All other medical institutions—health protection stations, polyclinics, hospitals, dispensaries, etc., are under the joint jurisdiction of the Local Soviets (Local Authorities) and of the People's Commissariat for Health of the various Republics.

In common with other Government Commissariats, the People's Commissariat for Health has a Planning Department, which submits a comprehensive and co-ordinated plan for all the Health Services—preventive and curative—of the U.S.S.R. forming a part of the State Five-Year Plan which governs the economic and social life of the country.

The Patient.

The administration of the Soviet medical services is based on Article 120 of the Soviet Constitution, which enacts that all citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to free medical services, and to maintenance in the event of sickness, old age or loss of capacity to work. Free medical services and a state-paid insurance which covers the worker from the day he reports sick to the day he returns to work or is awarded a pension—in either case ensuring him from two-thirds to the full amount of his average wages—play an important part in the drive for early diagnosis and preventive medicine.

The citizen, on the other hand, is expected—and to that end receives the necessary training—to play his part in the campaign for health, as the rank and file of an army staffed by the medical experts.

The Doctor.

The State Medical Services provide similar security for members of the medical profession. Before graduation every student discusses his choice of career with the University Authorities, and according to his choice and the standard he achieves, and after the necessary hospital or other experience is immediately absorbed into academic medicine or research, specialisation, or general practice in an urban or rural area. The State offers certain inducements to doctors to take up work in rural areas, these may include a free house, a free car, longer holidays on full pay (up to six weeks in the year), and compulsory post-graduate courses on full pay with all expenses met, every three years. Doctors, whether in town or country, normally work as a team, and receive their salaries from the State for a working day of five or six hours, which enables them to devote additional time to reading or research. Where there is still a marked shortage of doctors they may work one and a half "days," or even two, and draw the appropriate salary. This practice was fairly common in the early days when the standard of living was low and the shortage of doctors acute, but as these defects have gradually been remedied it has become less and less common. A doctor's standard of living is reasonably good whilst he is working, and when he retires at the age of fifty-five for women and sixty for men, as he is entitled to do, he also draws a pension amounting to between two-thirds and the full amount of his salary.

A doctor's consulting room and equipment are also provided by the State. In each district of the towns and cities, in many of the larger factories and works, in the smaller towns and groups of villages, and in the State and larger collective farms, doctors have their consulting rooms in a polyclinic—a local health centre with every facility for diagnosis and out-patient treatment. The larger polyclinics are equipped with X-ray, massage and electrical departments, with surgical out-patient theatres, ear, nose and throat, and dental rooms, a gymnasium, a day nursery for children requiring medical supervision, and many other facilities, including a dietetic restaurant to which patients requiring dietetic treatment may come for their main meals of the day. Smaller polyclinics have, of course, less elaborate equipment, but usually the polyclinic doctors or general practitioners have their consulting rooms under the same

roof as the specialists to whom they may wish to refer their patients for consultation or treatment, and smaller rural polyclinics can always refer their patients to larger district polyclinics. The patient's medical record card (which has recently been standardised throughout the Soviet Union) is filed and kept up to date in the record office of the polyclinic, and if the patient is transferred to hospital, accompanies him thither. Where a case is of particular interest, or where there is any divergence of opinion, consultations between polyclinic and hospital doctors are arranged. As there are a number of doctors attached to each polyclinic the patient is able to exercise his choice, although in general each polyclinic doctor has his own district, and visits his patients at home if they are unable to attend the polyclinic.

The Campaign.

In accordance with the original concept put forward by the first People's Commissar for Health, Semashko, in 1918, that "The protection of the health of the workers is the task of the workers themselves," medical and lay organisations, the medical man and the ordinary citizen work in the closest co-operation in the nation-wide campaign for health. The health services are built up from the broad basis of the individual doctor, health station, polyclinic and hospital, through the Departments of Public Health Protection of the Local and District Soviets, of the territorial regional and city Soviets, through the People's Commissariats for Public Health Protection of the Union and Autonomous Republics, to the apex, which is the People's Commissariat for Public Health Protection of the U.S.S.R.

Planning and Finance.

In each Five-Year Plan the expenditure item under the heading of "Public Health Protection" provides for the sums to be expended on health protection, and directs the allocation of these sums—the amounts required for research; training of doctors, nurses and midwives; the provision of new medical institutions and the extension and improvement of old ones, etc. These allocations are based on the reports and detailed requirements sent in by individual institutions, districts, regions, and so on. On the basis of the whole of the Five-Year Plan, which may entail the transference of industries, the building of new towns and the development of new areas, the People's Commissariat for Health works out the Plan for each Union Republic. Upon receipt of the figures the People's Commissariat of each Republic proceeds to allocate the funds to the various regions, the regions to the towns and districts, and the latter to the various medical institutions. As in all other aspects of the Plan the draft proposals applicable to each unit are discussed by them, and amendments and suggestions sent back before the plan is finally adopted.

In this way every medical institution of the U.S.S.R., from the scientific research institute to the local out-patient hospital, receives from the State under the general plan everything requisite for its work and progress.

ORGANISATION.

Health Stations.

The basic units of the system are the health protection stations in the factories, workshops, mines, State and collective farms, and so on. The primary function of these stations is to ensure good living and working conditions, and a consequent reduction in the incidence of sickness and industrial accidents. The doctors and nurses at these stations exercise control over working conditions in the workshops, canteens, etc. Acting in co-operation with the labour safety commission of the factory trade union committee, they supervise all safety measures and investigate the causes of accidents and occupational diseases, and work out proposals for their elimination; they examine medically all new workers in the enterprise, and periodically examine all adolescents in the factory and all workers in dangerous occupations; take measures to combat epidemic diseases, and carry out health education of the workers. These stations also render first aid in case of accident or sudden illness; they pay special attention to persons prone to frequent or chronic illness, and arrange the most favourable working conditions for them; they send workers to the dietetic dining rooms, and recommend them for free places in the health resorts and holiday homes.

Workers who need more skilled or specialised treatment are referred by the health protection stations to a polyclinic or hospital.

Hospitals.

From the polyclinics patients are transferred direct to general or specialised hospitals as required. There are many "specialised" hospitals where treatment and research on selected cases are combined, such as the hospital for occupational diseases in Moscow, from

which results of treatment and preventive measures are broadcast to the appropriate industries. Many of the larger factories have their own hospitals. The Dzerzhinsky textile mill in Moscow, for instance, has a hospital with its own X-ray department, maternity ward, psychological department, and chemical and bacteriological laboratories, staffed by over a hundred doctors, **Health Protection Boards of the Local Soviets.**

Each local Soviet (corresponding to our local authorities, and elected by universal adult suffrage for periods of two years) has a health protection board, which is frequently composed of men and women who have previously been elected "Health Inspectors" for their own block of flats, collective farm, etc., and who have subsequently received special courses of training at hygiene education centres.

A local health protection board exercises the following main functions :—

- (1) Supervision of all the hospitals and medical establishments in its area.
- (2) Organisation of sanitary inspection in the area.
- (3) Provision of educational facilities to popularise the teaching of hygiene and public health protection (Institutes of Health Culture, etc.).
- (4) Provision of facilities for physical culture (gymnasia, sports clubs, etc.).
- (5) Appointment of trustees for insane persons.

The People's Commissariat for Health of the U.S.S.R.

The supreme organ for the administration of the health services of the U.S.S.R. is a highly complex department of State. It consists of the People's Commissar and two Vice-Commissars, and two main councils administrative and advisory, with their various departments.

Its function is to supervise all measures aimed at the improvement of the medical services, and on the basis of the latest achievements of medical science and technique to introduce the most effective methods of prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease.

The Collegium, or Administrative Council, concerns itself mainly with the practical application of the decisions of the Commissariat, and the necessary administrative detail. Among its numerous departments, boards and bureaux, is the Bureau of Foreign Information, whose function it is to keep abreast of medical developments in other countries, and to facilitate the exchange of medical information between the U.S.S.R. and other countries. The head of this Bureau is also the delegate to the section of hygiene of the League of Nations.

Another section of especial interest is concerned with the management of the chemico-pharmaceutical industry. All pharmacological products are controlled by the State, and no drug may be distributed until checked and standardised through this department.

Sanitary inspection in all its branches is also under the control of the People's Commissariat, whose inspectors have sufficient powers to deal with any infringement of the public health regulations.

Outstanding among health protection measures are those directed by the special board for the control and prevention of epidemic disease. The wide network of epidemiological institutes, laboratories, disinfection stations, and trained inspectors wage ceaseless warfare against malaria, plague, endemic encephalitis, etc., and there is close collaboration between teams of scientists and clinicians working in the affected areas and at the central research institutes. All Union campaigns against tuberculosis and venereal diseases are also planned and controlled by their appropriate boards under this Council.

The Scientific Medical Council, or Advisory Council, is a body of medical experts without administrative responsibility, who advise the Commissariat on technical problems. It is composed of the heads of the various State scientific institutes, to which the Commissariat refers its multiple problems for investigation. Other scientists may be called to the Council's deliberations according to the problem under discussion.

By this means the People's Commissariat of Health is constantly advised by the best scientists in the country, the results of whose investigations can then be applied without delay throughout the whole Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

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