

Medicine in Overalls

By Vladimir Lyubovny

Medicine in overalls is the eloquent sobriquet of the health service for millions of industrial workers in the Soviet Union. Socialist society guarantees to every citizen accessible highly-skilled medical help free of charge. A specific system of medical treatment and disease prevention establishments were set up simultaneously to serve the employees of industrial, transport, construction and communications enterprises, a system conforming to the best of their interests and the conditions of their life and work. An organic element of that system is the departmental medical services. The supreme organisational and methodological management of such services, with their own hospitals, polyclinics, medical treatment centres, and sanatoria, remains with the USSR Ministry of Public Health.

There are several organisational forms of medical service for industrial workers, but their 'backbone' is the so-called divisional medical service, consisting of highly skilled therapists: about one doctor per 2,000 workers. Unlike his colleagues at territorial polyclinics or in-patient hospitals, the divisional doctor has special training in professional pathology, a branch of medicine studying the influence of production factors on the health of the workers. He must know labour hygiene and industrial sanitation, see his way very well in the organisation and specific features of the technology of his enterprise, be able to analyse the structure, the dynamics and the causes of general and professional diseases.

Practically all industrial workers regularly undergo general and specific (gynaecological, physical and other) medical examination. With the divisional therapist in charge, these examinations are being done by medical teams consisting of a surgeon, neuropathologist, gynaecologist, eye specialist, and dermatologist. The teams use the necessary laboratory and instrumentation techniques of investigation, X-ray, and functioning diagnosing. In complicated cases use is being made of inpatient examinations at local hospitals or at specialised professional pathology clinics of research institutes.

Treatment

The worker with signs of some disease, even a disease not connected with production, is duly registered at medical centres. The divisional doctor compiles, personally or after consulting medics specializing in other fields, an individual programme for the treatment of the patient, defines the nature and intensity of his labour stress, suggests that the trade union provide him with dietary meals free of charge, accommodation at a resort or an overnight sanatorium. The latter is a special kind of health improving establish-

ment with its own medical personnel, medical equipment and often even with balneotherapy facilities.

Besides medical work, the divisional doctor systematically deals with the prevention of diseases, checks working conditions and safety engineering at his enterprise, the organisation of public catering for workers, the observance of the water consumption regimen, the sanitary conditions at divisions, shower rooms, and wardrobes, the level of noise, purity of air and proper lighting. He gets aid in this respect from trade union activists, voluntary public inspectors and members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society as well as from assistant doctors of divisional medical centres.

These centres, situated as closely as possible to the working places, provide initial medical aid and function under the same time-table as the enterprise: 8, 16, or 24 hours a day, five or seven days a week, depending on the production regimen. The Centre has wards for divisional therapist and dentist (and sometimes for obstetrician-gynaecologist, if there are many women at the enterprise), manipulation and dressing posts, a large choice of physiotherapy instrumentation, inhalation units and installations for oxygen cocktails. Assistant doctors and nurses engage in the anti-relapse treatment of the patients as ordered by doctors, provide disease prevention treatment, train sanitary activists in the techniques of first aid and in the rules of patient care, and in the prevention of, and treatment for, microtraumas.

The Indivisible Complex

Divisional doctors can be in the staff of the territorial polyclinics serving a definite area, and in that case industrial workers are catered to out of turn. Many enterprises have their own polyclinics with a full set of specialist and curative and diagnosing services. They hospitalize patients as a rule in a definite hospital which reserves in advance a certain number of accommodations at its basic departments. Sometimes such a polyclinic caters to the employees of several plants and factories located in the same district.

Yet, it is considered that the optimal organisational form of medical service for industrial workers is the medical and sanitary division which is an indivisible complex of curative and disease prevention services ranging from the medical centres at divisions to a big in-patient department, and united by single management and an identical plan of work. It can be either a "closed" affair only for the local industrial, professional and office workers, or an "open" set up rendering medical aid to the members of their families and the population of the nearby territory. Medical and sanitary units belong and are subordinated to the public health bodies, but get the constant and generous material aid of the enterprise they serve which often shoulders the expenditure connected with the main tenancy and repair of buildings, the purchase of instrumentation, medicine, equipment, and curative and diagnosing apparatus. Besides, the establishment has its own budget of state allocations for public health.

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The in-patient department of the medical and sanitary unit observes the generally accepted standards of providing the population with hospital beds (ten or eleven per 1,000 of the population) and consists of departments of therapy, surgery and gynaecology, with sufficient facilities, a laboratory service, X-ray and functional diagnosing, physio-therapy and curative gymnastic wards. Yet, actually the choice of departments is much larger as a rule and is determined by the specific features of production at the enterprise being serviced. Besides, major industrial cities have professional pathology centres, specialised departments or clinics, and this not counting the national and republican research institutes of labour hygiene and professional diseases.

Continuous Treatment

Efficiency of medical aid to industrial workers is like-wise ensured by a clear-cut system of continuous treatment between the divisional service, the out-patient polyclinic establishments and in-patient departments. Patients are hospitalised only after thorough examination and advice of a specialist, and the results of examination are immediately sent to the divisional doctor with recommendations for further treatment, working and recreation regimen. There are the same kind of close contacts between the factory doctors and their colleagues from territorial polyclinics to which workers apply for urgent medical help at their place of residence, if this is more convenient.

Irrespective of the organisational forms of the medical service for industrial workers, the doctors engaged in it compile and carry into life, jointly with the management and the trade union organisation, all-round plans of health improvement measures envisaging the improvement and facilitation of working conditions, boosting of safety engineering, neutralisation of the harmful influences of the production factors, the observance of the state standards of industrial hygiene and sanitation, the prevention of general and professional diseases. The instructions from the medics about some worker having to be transferred to another job because of his health are obligatory for the management. The medics also deal with the prevention of production traumatism, and always participate in the investigation of every production accident, assess the degree of its gravity, extent of disability, invalid category and, consequently, the size of the compensation of the victim of the accident.

In their many-faceted curative and prophylactic work they proceed from the fundamentals of the public health legislation of the USSR and the Union Republics. This state law makes it incumbent on all the bodies of power, public organisations, ministries, departments, management of industrial enterprises etc. to bear collective responsibility for the protection of the health of the employees of socialist industrial enterprises. (APN)

Industrial Medicine

KEEPING people healthy as they work is the aim of industrial medicine, a relatively new science but one which is increasingly gaining in importance. The number of people who fall ill at work, either because of accident or stress, rises almost every year and that is where industrial medicine comes in.

Industrial medicine in fact has become so important that it has been included in the World Health Organization's catalogue of tasks in the following comprehensive manner: the doctor at work should be there not only to cure illness, but also to help prevent it. This means that in future, working people must not only stay healthy on the job, but should be able to enjoy the full benefit of their leisure time.

The medical and social policy significance of industrial medicine has now been fully realized in the Federal Republic of Germany. As early as in 1953, industrial medical agreements were concluded between the German Trade Union Federation, the Federal Association of Employers and interested doctors in which the basic outlines of the functions of industrial doctors were laid down. The next step was the setting up of professorships of industrial medicine and the establishment of numerous practices. All such initiatives coincide with the legislative activities of the Federal German Government which has concentrated special attention on health care for some years now.

For this reason, the founding of an industrial medicine centre by the Rheinische Braunkohlenwerke, A Ganthracite mining concern at Weiden, near Cologne, attracted great attention.

Attached to the Weiden centre are company doctors already on a regional basis for this power and coal concern, which has a plant spread over a wide area between Cologne, Aachen and Grevenbroich. When individual company doctors cannot cope, the work load is taken over by the centre, which has five doctors and twelve medical assistants. Two small buses are used to transport patients.

Based on the principle that "prevention is better than cure," industrial medicine exports place diagnostics first and foremost. The main effort is early diagnosis of dangerous diseases such as heart damage and cancer. Every candidate for employment is thoroughly examined and every employee on the pay-roll comes along regularly for a routine check.

The industrial medicine centre has an X-ray section (equipped with special instruments for early diagnoses of cancer and mobile X-ray unit), a clinical laboratory for diagnoses in all bodily functions, electro-cardiography, osillography and a department for diagnosis of hearing and vision ailments, also with a so-called "audiomobile" for mass examinations.

Industrial medicine is going to catch on rapidly in West Germany where under a newly drafted law, all employers and firms will have to engage company doctors and labour safety experts.

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