

# HISTORY OF MEDICINE

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# ИЗ ИСТОРИИ МЕДИЦИНЫ

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## SKIN DISEASES IN THE CONTEXT OF SUPERSTITIOUS IDEAS IN RUSSIAN FOLK MEDICINE

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**ABSTRACT.** Superstitions concerning health have existed among the people for centuries: unknown about the real causes of ailments, people found many supernatural explanations of them. The article examines the specifics of superstitious ideas — customs, omens, beliefs about the causes of skin diseases in the adult and child population, as well as their influence on the methods of treatment in Russian everyday life. Despite the fact that superstitious methods of treatment occupied one of the first places in the treatment of various skin diseases, only fragmentary data are found in the literature regarding this issue. The authors tried to systematize information on this topic. With this purpose the works of domestic authors — researchers of Russian national routine medicine, as well as a number of historical, ethnographic and folklore materials have been studied. Skin diseases, known from ancient times, were quite common among people of all ages and classes, and the area of the mysterious origin of skin diseases was extremely large and diverse. Russian folk routine medicine included a number of rational means and various magical techniques. The article provides examples of popular views on the causes and origin of skin diseases being of particular interest, since they also explain peculiar ways of popular self-healing. Among the causes of skin diseases on the one hand, the impact of adverse external factors was recognized, on the other hand evil spirits were present. Superstition is unusually tenacious: in the worldview of modern people, despite the achievements of evidence-based medicine, superstitions and signs regarding health persist. In dermatological practice, this is probably facilitated by the variety of skin diseases, the duration of most of them, polymorphism of rashes, localization in visible areas of the skin, and the difficulties of providing effective therapy. According to doctors' observations, such methods of treating skin diseases remain popular among the population at present.

**KEY WORDS:** superstition; skin diseases; Russian folk routine medicine; ideas about the causes of skin diseases in Russian life; healing techniques.

# ЗАБОЛЕВАНИЯ КОЖИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СУЕВЕРНЫХ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЙ В РУССКОЙ НАРОДНО-БЫТОВОЙ МЕДИЦИНЕ

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**РЕЗЮМЕ.** Суеверия относительно здоровья бытовали в народе на протяжении веков: не понимая реальных причин недугов, люди находили им множество сверхъестественных объяснений. В статье рассматривается специфика суеверных представлений — обычаев, примет, поверий — о причинах заболеваний кожи у взрослого и детского населения, а также их влияние на способы лечения в русском народном быту. Несмотря на то что суеверные способы лечения занимали одно из первых мест в лечении различных кожных болезней, относительно данного вопроса в литературе встречаются только отрывочные данные. Авторами сделана попытка систематизировать сведения по этой теме. Для реализации цели исследования были изучены труды отечественных авторов-исследователей русской народно-бытовой медицины, а также ряд историко-этнографических и фольклорных материалов. Кожные заболевания, известные с древнейших времен, были довольно частым явлением среди всех возрастов и сословий, а область таинственного в деле происхождения кожных болезней была чрезвычайно велика и разнообразна. Русская народно-бытовая медицина состояла из рациональных средств и различных магических приемов. В статье приводятся примеры бытовавших в народе взглядов на причины и происхождение кожных болезней, представляющих особый интерес, т.к. они объясняют и своеобразные способы народного самоврачевания. В числе причин кожных болезней признавалось, с одной стороны, воздействие неблагоприятных внешних факторов, с другой — злых духов. Суеверия необычайно живучи: в мировоззрении современных людей, несмотря на достижения доказательной медицины, стойко сохраняются суеверия и приметы относительно здоровья. В дерматологической практике этому, вероятно, способствуют разнообразие кожных заболеваний, длительность течения большинства из них, полиморфизм высыпаний, локализация на видимых участках кожного покрова, трудности терапии. По наблюдениям врачей, подобные методы лечения кожных заболеваний остаются популярными среди населения и в настоящее время.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** суеверия; кожные болезни; русская народно-бытовая медицина; представления о причинах кожных болезней в русском быту; приемы врачевания.

The historian and ethnographer of the XIX century, an expert of Russian folk life M.M. Zabylin, the author of the work “Russian people: their customs, rituals, traditions, superstitions and poetry”, published in 1880, wrote: “To what could be attributed that not only in Russia, but also in the whole Europe there are so many superstitious distorted notions and beliefs? It seems that they

could be destroyed, but, unfortunately, they one generation passes them to another from century to century, with all their trifles, rituals, attributing often to absolutely insignificant things incomprehensible miracles” [13].

And further he argues that such a “stupid belief” is not only common among commoners or people who have not received any education

and inherited such concepts from their fathers and grandfathers, but “why people more developed, even educated people are not strangers to different prejudices? This is a problem that is not easy to solve” [13]. These words sound relevant today. Belief in superstitions and omens has not become less in the XXI century.

Since superstitions are inherent in people regardless of their education, age, social status, it suggests that they simplify and stabilise the image of the constantly changing social world, make it more understandable and predictable [11].

In the case of health care, superstitions and omens occupy a significant place in the lives of both patients (ordinary people) and medical workers, which is confirmed by a number of studies [15, 29].

In Latin, the word “superstitio” (“superstition”) means “survivor”, “remnant”, so superstition is most often called the remnants of ancient pagan beliefs and rituals. Every superstition is a prejudice, but not every prejudice is a superstition. To become a superstition, it should proceed from the belief in the existence of supernatural forces, from the recognition of the usefulness of human witchcraft in attempts to influence nature, health, omens of the future [28]. The great connoisseur of the Russian language V.I. Dahl (1801–1872) called superstition (from the Old Slavonic word “sue” or “vzue” — “in vain”) “An erroneous, empty, nonsense, false belief in something; belief in the miraculous, supernatural, in sorcery, fortune-telling, in omens; belief in cause and effect, where no causal relationship is seen” [6].

The explanatory dictionary of the Russian language edited by D.N. Ushakov contains the following definition of the term “superstition”: “Religious prejudice, representing phenomena and events in life as a manifestation of miraculous supernatural forces and omens of the future. Superstition arose on the basis of primitive, vestigial ideas about the forces of nature. Belief in omens is one of the characteristic manifestations of superstition” [26].

The purpose of this article is to reveal the specifics of superstitious ideas (customs, omens, beliefs) about the causes of skin diseases in adults and children, as well as their influence on the methods of treatment in Russian folk life. The basis of this work was the study of the works of Russian authors — researchers of Russian folk medicine in the context of the

peculiarities of the functioning of culture in traditional society [3, 4, 9, 15, 18, 20, 25], as well as the analysis of historical-ethnographic and folklore materials containing information about the ancient beliefs of the Russian people in various diseases [7, 8, 14, 21].

Superstition is a folk belief that has its historical and psychological basis. The source or prerequisite for the emergence of superstition is considered to be mythological thinking with its own respect for the traditions of ancestors. Some features of archaic beliefs persistently break through into life and persist even nowadays.

All superstitions, regardless of the form in which they manifest themselves, are united by one common feature — they assert the existence of beyond, supernatural forces, on which, as if dependent on human life. According to the source of origin superstitions were often associated with a random coincidence of time and place of events, in fact, have no apparent connection between themselves. Superstitions and folk beliefs are inseparable from magic and magical knowledge. In magical world-understanding all visible nature was perceived as an arena of action of living forces, spirits and essences. The borders between external-material reality and internal-spiritual worlds were considered permeable [3]. Superstitious omen is a child of fear. People, constantly feeling themselves under the threat of danger, the source of which they did not know, anxiously searched for at least the slightest sign that allowed them to foresee, and, perhaps, to prevent bad influence.

Omen, customs and beliefs affected all manifestations of folk life. Superstitions played a special role in people’s desire to find happiness, riches, various earthly goods, to get rid of diseases.

Superstitions about health have also existed throughout the centuries: people, without understanding the real causes of ailments, found many supernatural explanations for them. For the traditional, pagan view on the nature of diseases and methods of their treatment were of great importance various kinds of omens, guided by which people sought to avoid misfortune or, at least, psychologically prepare for it [9]. And these omens, despite the centuries separating them, are extremely similar in logic of construction and even in general stylistics. For comparison we can refer to the work of G.I. Popov (1856–1909), which explores folk medicine based on the materials of the ethnographic bureau of Duke

V.N. Tenishev<sup>1</sup>. Among the omens that were considered bad signs for a sick person are the cawing of crows and the untimely singing of a rooster. According to G.I. Popov, omens, prognostics of folk medicine “only in a small number of cases are based on physical and physiological signs and almost all the weight lies on purely superstitious bases” [21].

An extremely large role in the origin of certain diseases was attributed to witchcraft, spoilage, sorcery, demon possession, etc. The study of old Russian folk medicine narratives has been carried out. A large number of works are devoted to the study of ancient beliefs of the Russian people in various diseases. There were many different omens concerning the growth and development of children in Russia. Authors who researched Russian folk medicine (V.F. Demich, G.I. Popov, L.F. Zmeyev, etc.) described many prejudices, superstitions and sometimes completely wild rites related to the care of children, their diseases and treatment. An outstanding researcher of Russian folk medicine doctor V.F. Demich (1858–1930) noted: “In no area of folk life superstition is not manifested with such force as in the treatment and education of children” [7]. A special role in Russian folk life was given to superstition in the issues of the origin of skin diseases in children and adults, and the cycle of superstitious means and methods of treatment occupied one of the first places.

The views of folk medicine on the causes and origin of skin diseases are of special interest, as they explain the peculiar ways of folk self-healing. Skin diseases, known since ancient times, were quite common among all ages and classes. Their high prevalence in the peasant environment was explained by the crowding of people in the huts, the need to keep livestock there, the impossibility of maintaining cleanliness. Some skin diseases were also influenced by climatic conditions: constant wearing of clothes in cold, damp and unsanitary conditions increased the probability of fungal infection, various dermatitis and scabies. The same reasons contributed to the development of skin diseases in children,

exematisation of skin processes under inappropriate housing and infrequent bathing [7, 18]. However, folk ideas about the origin of diseases had echoes of superstition, misconceptions, and unscientific interpretations inherited from the middle ages [27]. All diseases were divided into those originating from natural causes and incomprehensible, supernatural ones. Among the causes of skin diseases was recognised, on the one hand, the impact of unfavourable external factors, on the other — evil spirits [5, 28].

It was popularly believed that a skin disease could be acquired through the transmission of it by someone else, through “planting” and “transfer” (e.g., warts). It should be noted here that “transfer” of the disease played a double role in peasant life: both as one of the causes of skin diseases and as a way of getting rid of them. This transfer also took place through some incantations, which were thrown on the road or through clothes taken off the sick person and left somewhere. In all these cases, the disease passes to the one who picks up or takes these objects. Guided by such considerations, in case of various rashes the child’s underwear was tied with a belt, taken to the crossroads and left there, being quite sure that whoever picks it up, on him “the disease is applied” [21]. This is connected with superstitious ideas about crossroads as a kind of border of the outer and otherworld, a place of accumulation of energy. That is why peasants were afraid to lift any thing on the boundary line or at the crossroads. The one who picked it up had to take it back to its original place and there spit three times on the side. The basis of this belief is undoubtedly the fact of spreading (transferring) of some diseases (rashes) of infectious character through things that were in contact with a sick person. So, in those cases, when they wanted to transfer warts to others, they cut out on a stick, according to the number of warts, scars and threw at the crossroads, without talking to anyone and without looking back: who will pick it up, the warts will be transferred to him, or sometimes for this purpose they threw a cut and tied in a rag wart. To cure scabies, they took a piece of cloth, rubbed it on the sore spot and threw it on the big road: whoever picks it up first, the disease will pass to him [25].

Belief in the evil eye has been one of the most widespread types of superstition for several millennia, with rituals associated with ridding and protecting against the evil eye persisting to this day in almost unchanged form. Fear of the evil

<sup>1</sup> “The Ethnographic Bureau” was created by Duke V.N. Tenishev in 1897 with the aim of studying the life and everyday life of the Great Russian population in the most complete way possible and collecting information on the Russian peasantry. As a result of three years of work (1898–1900), the richest material was collected, containing descriptions of Russian traditional culture in 23 provinces of European Russia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

eye is the most widespread irrational type of fear in Russia, consisting in the fact that a person fears another person, his “evil” eye, which mystically can cause harm [10]. The people believed that skin diseases, especially in children, could be obtained from the evil eye, the concept of which included “notions of unexplained danger that could come from contact with another person: conversation, speeches (stipulation, verdict, lesson), touch, breathing, glance (evil eye)”. In this sense, they were especially afraid of “strangers”, people with physical abnormalities: crooked, blind, one-legged and one-armed, lame, mute; people with a certain colour of hair and eyes (usually black); violators of marriage norms, for example, those who had been married two or three times. A variant of the evil eye — “ozev” — was inflicted with an evil eye on those children who yawned and did not cross their mouths; the lesson could come from envious praise. As a result of the evil eye a child could have any childhood disease, including red spots and rashes [22].

Another cause of skin diseases was the idea that a person got sick because he or she stepped over “uncleanness” — a place in the street or yard where ordinary people emptied their bladders [16].

The emergence of diseases was also associated with “the impact on man of mythological characters as punishment for the violation of prohibitions governing the relationship between them and man”: in essence, mythological personifications of various diseases [3]. Human illnesses penetrated into the house or human body from the outside, unexpectedly. They as a living, hostile creature temporarily settled in the human body and could be transferred from it to others. In folk tradition, demons causing various diseases, most often represented in anthropomorphic form: in the guise of an ugly bony woman, often emaciated, maimed or ugly girl with fiery eyes and bared teeth, usually with loose hair, barefoot, wrapped in some cloth, less often in a male or indeterminate form (someone) [3, 23]. People believed in a “messenger” demon who could take the form of some animal or bird and, appearing suddenly in front of the victim, produce one or another disease, including skin disease. In the superstitious imagination the simplest cases were able to create a confidence in the inevitability of some disease [21].

Demons could also be represented by natural phenomena: fog, clouds, mist, air. Thus, in a num-

ber of places there was a belief that a cloud flying low enough above the ground caused diseases in the space it occupied in its flight. To avoid this, the people decided to place guards on high mounds, so that the guards, seeing the cloud, would let all the inhabitants know about it and they could hide [8, 23].

The study of folk-medical symbolism associated with various natural objects (fire, water, earth, moon, trees, animals) allows us to clarify the traditional ideas about diseases [17]. According to some explanations, the direct causes of disease were seen in the impact of wind jets, air currents. In the aspect of experiential knowledge, the symbolism of wind may indicate the observation of the influence of atmospheric changes on bodily states. It can be assumed that the results of systematic observations of the reactions of the organism during the change of seasons were recorded in omens. The people held the belief that the wind brings the spoilage, and from its influence in a person can get diseases. Thus, the wind as a causative agent of disease was attributed to the appearance of colds on the lips — “vetrenitsa” (*herpeslabialis*), and it was called “kiss of fever” [3]. It was believed that various rashes, especially in children, according to popular beliefs, “tied to the wind” [21]. According to other data, one could get a disease by tying a handkerchief torn off by a whirlwind. Such an attribute of illnesses as wings belonged to the symbolism of air movements. Apparently, the beliefs that the first swallows could bring illness were connected with this. In mythological thinking, the wind could play the role of retribution for human violations of the world system [3].

According to popular beliefs, a number of different skin diseases are associated with fire. Thus, it was believed that one of the causes of “flying fire” (*herpeslabialis*) and other skin diseases was disrespectful attitude to fire, which, according to popular beliefs, was of divine origin — from the sword of Archangel Michael. Such rashes could appear in a child who violated the prohibition not to spit in the fire. It was said: “You can’t spit in the fire — a bubble on your tongue will pop up or you’ll get sick with volatility”. Perhaps, the connection of skin diseases with fire was also based on the similarity of signs and symptoms of burns and skin lesions caused by some diseases.

The cause of skin diseases, especially scabies or other itchy rashes, in folk-medical beliefs was often an animal. Thus, it was believed that diseases could appear in a person if he stepped on scratching strips of the ground by the paws of a

dog or a wolf. Among the examples of skin diseases associated with the image of the wolf is the well-known autoimmune disease systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). The term *Lupus erythematosus* (lupus) comes from the Latin word “*lupus*” (wolf). It is a disease characterised by a butterfly-like rash on the face. According to the first doctors who described the disease, the external manifestations of the disease, circles with pale skin, resembled a wolf bite. Hence the name. “Wolf terminology” has been used since the medieval period to refer to various skin lesions characterised by deep wounds resembling bite marks. Another idea about the origin of the term is related to the superstitions of the middle ages — this is the fear-inspiring idea of magical reincarnation of some people into animals, lycanthropy (according to medieval folklore, some people had the ability to turn into a wolf, in other words, were werewolves). In a number of interpretations it was believed that animals acting as symbols of fire (dog, wolf, eagle) could punish people by afflicting them with skin diseases [24]. Perhaps, these mythological beliefs formed the basis of beliefs according to which the skin of a person who stepped on the place where an angry wolf or dog tore the ground with its claws could be affected by itchy rashes, boils and ulcers [2, 7, 24].

In other cases, the patient himself was the culprit of the disease: the appearance of colds on the lips (*herpeslabialis*) originated from “*podumu*”: a person could fall ill by looking at a patient with another rash [21].

Superstition also played a major role in the treatment of skin diseases in children and adults. Superstitious treatment of skin diseases is quite extensive. A sick person was not in a hurry to resort to the help of a healer, so he turned to folk beliefs based on intuition, never ceasing to believe that one could be cured of everything except death. Folk methods of treatment were widespread among various social groups at all times: both in the middle ages and in the traditional culture of the Russian peasantry of the modern times. The reason for this was mainly the lack of medical care and the low educational level of the population, especially in rural areas. Y.A. Chistovich (1820–1885), a famous Russian hygienist, forensic physician and historian of medicine, wrote: “other Russian people, people who were not rich, dark, poorly educated and especially the “common people” were not treated at all and were even afraid of German treatment. Not that they did not get sick and did not need help with illnesses: but they un-

derstood medical help in a special way, apart from foreign healers — partly inaccessible for poor people, and partly unfamiliar and therefore strange and inspiring fear instead of trust. Being caught by the disease, simple and dark people sought help in their own environment, sought it from witch doctors and witches, according to tradition, since ancient times engaged in this business” [27].

Russian folk medicine consisted of rational means and various magical methods. And if the use of rational means was based on rich folk experience and centuries-old observations of peasants about the nature around them, then magical methods were based on false ideas about the origin of diseases [4].

An important role in the treatment of skin diseases played the principle of the similarity (the imitative magic), which is based on provoking the desired, based on figurative and symbolic similarity. For this purpose plant bark was often used by analogy with skin, applying the bark or wrapping the affected places with it. Dew was treated by applying strawberries or geranium flowers (red to red). “*Koltun*”<sup>2</sup> (or *gostets*), which according to popular beliefs appears as an evil spirit that settled in a person, was treated with a decoction of white mistletoe, believing that it would transfer to its similarly tangled and sticky stems [3, 22]. If someone “offended” it by inept treatment, the guest turned into a dangerous and difficult to cure disease.

Another expression of this principle manifested itself in outlining skin rashes with charcoal in a circle (it is known that the pathological focus on the skin often has a rounded shape), which could also be associated with the superstitious idea of limiting the disease to a circle or a line. According to the principle of similarity, warts were treated with grasses plucked from the root. Or in the hay they looked for a blade of grass cut together with the earth and root, and rubbed warts with this root: as the grass with the root was cut, so the wart with the root would fall out [21]. The principle of similarity also justifies the treatment of skin diseases with fire and burning objects in cases when the picture of skin disease had external signs of burns. Fire treatment was widespread. According to the popular conception, the pure fire (which was extracted by friction or carved from a firebrick) had a cleansing and healing power, so to

<sup>2</sup> Koltun — an inflammation of the sebaceous glands on the head, resulting from poor hygiene, lack of combing, lice.

cleans the body from rashes, sparks were carved over the affected areas, the firebrick was beaten in front of the patient's face so that sparks flew on it. In some places a sick child with a wet rash, called "ogonnik" (an eczema), had a broom applied to his face. Fire was also used to treat the so-called "flying fire" (herpetic rashes on the face). In a number of localities, when treating various rashes in children, the magic symbolism of the ring finger was used, which, having no name, according to folk beliefs had special properties and was connected with the otherworld. To cure a child, they said: "This finger has no name, and this baby has no pain, fire. Fire, take your fire, leave my child clean and healthy". In some cases, fire was also used to treat the face, as if "burning" it out. For this purpose they took a handful of zamashka, plucked a few fibres and, with the pronunciation of a special kind of incantation, lit it over the place affected by the rye. Perhaps, these methods of healing were also connected with the ancient pagan veneration of fire [1, 2, 12, 23, 28].

In the treatment of various diseases, particularly skin diseases, methods of partial magic were used, which implied the transfer of properties of the whole to its parts. Such actions were expressed by the introduction of substitute objects into the ritual, which were in contact with the patient and as a part symbolised the whole. The sickness was "measured" with a thread: the sick child's head, torso, arms, legs were measured and this thread (with the child's hair and nails) was put into a hole drilled in the door, the hole was hammered with a peg, after that the sickness, as hidden in the wood of the door, disappeared from the child. It was believed that measuring destroys the disease [5, 12, 22]. In order to destroy the disease altogether (including rashes in children), in some cases they did it in the following way: several hairs were cut off from a sick person, nails were trimmed, a hole was drilled in an aspen tree at the level of the child's height and, having put nails and hair there, a stone was hammered in [3, 21]. The objects-substitutes, acting as carriers of the disease, were also transferred to the sacral natural sphere. For this purpose, the water used to wash a sick person was poured only into certain loci, which were thought to be in contact with the other world. The same thing was done with other objects that were in contact with the sick [3].

The wolf/dog was associated not only with some skin diseases, but also with the methods

of their treatment. In Russian folk life, the ritual of getting rid of a disease by transferring it (the method of "translation") to animals was widespread. To do this, sometimes in some rashes smeared affected places with sour cream and gave to lick off the disease to a dog or applied to rashes, boils a piece of bread and threw to the dog with the words: "Take your bread". Another way of treating skin diseases associated with animals was to imitate tying a wart with a thread, after which the used threads were mixed with millet and thrown "...under the henhouse, under the roost. The hens will eat the millet, and the thread will rot there, then the warts will come off". Appeal to chickens in healing incantations and other magical procedures is connected, apparently, with folk ideas about a rooster and a hen as "pure" animals, with the fact that the rooster is able to see the unclean force, to warn about misfortune by its unusual behaviour [21]. Chthonic creatures such as frogs, toads, snakes, lizards were endowed with a special power of influence on the diseases they brought. Significant in the ritual plan, these animals were used in magical methods of curing from ailments. Disease could be transferred through a kiss to a toad, or through spitting into the mouth of a frog. Particles of the sick person's clothes were placed on the toad's back (an invariant of drowning the sick person's clothes). In order to avert the disease from a person, they drank water in which a frog was kept for nine days, drank infusions of frog liver or decoction of a frog in milk [3].

Snake skin had special magical properties. As it could be separated and then preserved, it was attributed a special concentration of vital force, which was used in the treatment of skin diseases. Thus, in some areas the treatment of scabies was reduced to the fact that the patient was washed with water extracted from the skin of a snake, or the skin of this animal was burned [17].

In some cases rashes were treated with earth. For example, in some areas for this purpose rubbed it on a shirt and put it on the patient. Bread and cereals were used for magical purposes. Probably, it was connected with the fact that bread was the most important sacral product of agricultural culture. For example, to get rid of warts it was necessary to rub them with wet millet "for the waning of the month" [5, 22].

Children often had cracked skin on their hands or feet ("the devil rubs the skin") — according to modern ideas, manifestations

of dyshidrosis — in this case it was believed that to get rid of it it was necessary to write three crosses in ink on the sick fingers [25].

The notion of ritual purity of birch trees and their special power led to the idea that birch trees were not afraid of evil forces and diseases: it was believed that touching of the birch branches (washing in a bath with a birch broom) prevented skin diseases [17, 19].

The attitude to moles was ambiguous: in some places they tried to get rid of them and treated them with “skinny saliva” (this saliva taken in the morning, before eating and drinking water) [22]. According to other ideas, the presence of moles was considered a happy sign and was probably connected with folk ideas about spoilage: amulets were considered an artificial distraction of “evil” look, and moles were considered a natural one [19].

One of the methods of protection from various diseases and misfortunes, widely used in Russia and has not lost its popularity in our time, was the method of knitting and wearing special knots — nauzes. The tying was understood, firstly, in the sense of preventing disease and spoilage, and secondly, in the sense of capturing by thread or knot of disease and transferring it to another place. Often such a technique was used to treat children with skin rashes. A widespread method of treatment of warts consisted in the fact that the thread was tied on the number of warts, knots and buried it in the ground, manure or put under the heel of the door: the warts will disappear as soon as the thread rots; often in this case circled the thread around the warts in turn, starting with the largest, and tied knots [21, 25]. The following method was also practised for warts: it was believed that “it was necessary to tie nine times a wart with a harsh thread and throw away these nine knots — the warts will disappear” [25].

Thus, it is obvious that the range of superstitious remedies is extremely diverse. Apparently, there is not a single disease, against which, according to folk beliefs, there would not be in stock one or another superstitious remedy. Superstitious ways occupied one of the first places in the treatment of various skin diseases. Variety of skin diseases, duration of course of the majority of them, polymorphism of rashes, their localisation on visible parts of the skin, difficulties of therapy support vitality of superstitions and in modern dermatological practice. Considering that chronic dermatoses have a great impact on the psychological status of the patient,

superstitious beliefs and rituals probably contribute to reducing the intensity of experiences and compensate for the lack of information about the further course of the disease. Even today, dermatologists often meet with such practices when treating patients with skin diseases.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Author contribution.** Thereby, all authors made a substantial contribution to the conception of the study, acquisition, analysis, interpretation of data for the work, drafting and revising the article, final approval of the version to be published and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the study.

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