

HISTORY OF MEDICINE

ИЗ ИСТОРИИ МЕДИЦИНЫ

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Valentin Felixovich Voyno-Yasenetsky (Saint Luke) as an organizer of healthcare in pre-revolutionary Russia

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ABSTRACT. Valentin Felixovich Voyno-Yasenetsky, glorified in 2000 at the Council of New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church as Saint Luke of Crimea, is known throughout the world as a brilliant surgeon and a major scientist who discovered and developed such areas of medicine as regional anesthesia and purulent surgery. His scientific and medical achievements, as well as his unusual life path that does not fit into any framework, somewhat obscure another facet of this man's personality — he was a talented organizer of healthcare, although the conditions in which he had to demonstrate these qualities were not the most favorable. The article is the first to examine the facts of V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky's biography related to the organization of health care. During the Russian-Japanese War, immediately after graduating from the medical faculty of the Kyiv University of Saint Vladimir, he was the head of two departments of the Chita Red Cross Hospital, in 1906–1916 he was actively involved in organizing the treatment process in the medical institutions entrusted to him, participated in preventive anti-epidemic measures, put forward creative initiatives at the zemstvo level. Thanks to his initiatives, a scientific medical library was created, the organization of the treatment process in the zemstvo hospitals of Ardatov, Lyubazh, Fatezh, Romanovka and especially Pereslavl-Zalessky was changed. For 6.5 years he worked at the last mentioned zemstvo hospital as a chief physician, adapting it during the First World War for an infirmary for the wounded and organizing the treatment of the wounded at the district level. He also put forward useful initiatives in the field of exchanging medical experience and medical statistics.

KEYWORDS: health care organization, zemstvo hospitals, hospitals for the wounded during the First World War, surgeon V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky (Saint Luke)

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Валентин Феликсович Войно-Ясенецкий (Святитель Лука) как организатор здравоохранения в дореволюционной России

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РЕЗЮМЕ. Валентин Феликсович Войно-Ясенецкий, прославленный в 2000 году в Соборе новомучеников и исповедников церкви русской как святитель Лука Крымский, известен во всем мире как гениальный хирург и крупный ученый, открывший и развивавший в медицине такие направления, как регионарная анестезия и гнойная хирургия. Его научные и врачебные достижения, а также необычный жизненный путь, не укладывающийся ни в какие рамки, несколько затеняют еще одну грань личности этого человека — он был талантливым организатором здравоохранения. Хотя условия, в которых ему пришлось проявлять эти свои способности, были не самыми благоприятными. В статье впервые рассматриваются факты биографии В.Ф. Войно-Ясенецкого, относящиеся к сфере организации здравоохранения в дореволюционной России. Во время Русско-японской войны, сразу после окончания медицинского факультета Киевского университета Святого Владимира, он был заведующим двух отделений Читинского госпиталя Красного Креста, в 1906–1916-е годы активно занимался организацией лечебного процесса во вверенных ему лечебных учреждениях, участвовал в профилактических противоэпидемических мероприятиях, выдвигал творческие инициативы на уровне земств. Благодаря его деятельности была создана научная медицинская библиотека, изменилась организация лечебного процесса в земских больницах Ардатова, Любажа, Фатежа, Романовки и особенно Переславля-Залесского, где он 6,5 лет проработал главным врачом земской больницы, приспособив ее в годы Первой мировой войны под лазарет и занимаясь организацией лечения раненых на уровне уезда. Он также выдвинул полезные инициативы в области обмена врачебным опытом и медицинской статистики.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: организация здравоохранения, земские больницы, лазареты для раненых Первой мировой войны, хирург В.Ф. Войно-Ясенецкий (святитель Лука)

IN DEFENSE OF THE LIFE AND HEALTH OF “ORDINARY PEOPLE”

Currently, the term “healthcare” is a social functional system uniting “the entire complex of state, collective-group and personal measures aimed at protecting the life and health of each person and the entire population” [1].

The first part of this mission was protecting the life and health of every human and had been close to the heart of Dr. V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky, the future St. Luke, since his youth. Even before becoming a student at the medical faculty of the Kyiv University of St. Vladimir, he set for himself the goal of life “to be useful to ordinary people”. Later, after graduation, he formulated his life’s goal as follows: “to be a peasant’s doctor, a zemstvo physician” [2].

However, this dream did not come true immediately. Having graduated from university in the year the Russo-Japanese War began, the young graduate joined the Kiev Red Cross detachment and followed his fiancée A.V. Lanskaya to Chita, where she was serving as a sister of mercy. Working in the lazaretto of Kiev detachment, he got the first surgical experience. Soon he showed such outstanding abilities that he was immediately appointed head of two departments: infectious diseases and ophthalmology, since he showed a special interest in eye surgeries. The young doctor also became a permanent assistant to the experienced surgeon S.Ya. Golomba in surgical department. Then, V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky was assigned to be the head of the second surgical department opened at that time in the hospital due to the influx of wounded soldiers from the front. Thus, since his first steps in the medicine, surgeon V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky faced the need to solve organizational problems, so far at the level of his department, which consisted of several wards for lower ranks (70 beds) and one ward for officers (20 beds) [3].

Apparently, the work of a novice doctor as the head of the department and surgeon was so successful, that S.S. Botkin, who was involved in management of healthcare during the war in the Far East, planned to invite him to manage a large hospital in Vladivostok. In April 20, 1904, S.S. Botkin wrote to his wife: “In the near future we will open a good surgical hospital with 400 beds, with a good head surgeon (a certain Voyno)” [4]. However, due to some reasons, this appointment did not take place. In January 1905,

Valentin Felixovich and his wife Anna Vasilievna left Chita.

After the war ended, the family began to implement Valentin Felixovich’s life plan — serving in zemstvo medicine. While working as a surgeon at the Ardatskaya Zemstvo Hospital in the Simbirsk Governorate, the young doctor not only honed his surgical skills and medical expertise, initiated research on various anesthesia methods, but also handled administrative matters. In 1905, Simbirsk Governorate and the entire Middle Volga Region were preparing for an outbreak of Asiatic cholera, which was a common occurrence of that era. According to this fact, in March 24–25, in Moscow, the Pirogov Anti-Cholera Congress took place, and V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky took part. The Congress discussed issues of cholera epidemiology and prevention, the organization of anti-cholera measures in zemstvos, and the use of anti-cholera vaccinations, which were an innovation at that time and were not easily making their way [5].

Returning to Ardatov, Valentin Felixovich made a great effort to organize and conduct these events. However, the efficiency of his work was seriously hampered by the enormous, human-scale workload that fell on the zemstvo doctors of the Ardatovsky district of the Simbirsk Governorate. It exceeded 15,000 outpatients per year. In other governorates, the workload was no higher than 10,000–12,000 patients per year, which was considered the norm of that time, under which a doctor was able to work effectively [3]. Always striving for maximum productivity in his work with full dedication, Valentin Felixovich after 5 months transferred to work in the zemstvo hospital of the Verkhnyubazhsky medical district, Fatezhsky Uyezd of Kursk Governorate.

This district was opened only in 1905, the hospital building was not yet completed, and therefore, at first, the young doctor only provided outpatient medical care, which did not prevent him from performing 368 surgeries a year and attracting many patients to his hospital. And here, Valentin Felixovich showed special attention to the organization of the medical process: from the first months of work, he demanded from the zemstvo council additional funding for the acquisition of new surgical instruments, as well as greater independence in his actions. For example, the right to choose his own assistants, to add another paramedic and outpatient staff to

the approved staff, and asked to limit the number of outpatient patients to 60 people per day [3]. As a result, the zemstvo council, seeing that the high activity and professional level of the young surgeon did not fit into the modest conditions of Verkhniy Lyubazh, transferred him to the city hospital of the district town of Fatezh. At the same time, he managed to establish a new procedure for receiving patients, in which a paramedic would receive patients together with the doctor, so that it was possible to cope with a greater workload.

In Fatezh, V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky set several conditions for his transfer: granting him independence, equalizing his rights with the senior doctor, and building a new outpatient clinic where only surgical patients would be admitted. Most of these measures were approved by the zemstvo council and began to be implemented, but the process was interrupted by a conflict between the surgeon and the new chairman of the zemstvo council, his long-time enemy L.P. Batetzatul. Valentin Felixovich “did not immediately leave all his affairs to go to the ill police chief (isprevnik)”, for which he was declared almost a revolutionary who did not want to obey his superiors, and was simply fired [2].

V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky went to Kyiv, then in Moscow, and after that entered the residency program at the Imperial Moscow University under Professor P.I. Dyakonov, which laid the foundation for his future brilliant doctoral dissertation on regional anesthesia. In March 1909, V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky began working as a surgeon at the Zemstvo Hospital in the sloboda of Romanovka, Balashovsky Uyezd, Saratov Governorate. The surgeon provided a detailed account of his work in Romanovka in his Report on Surgical Activity at the Romanovka Zemstvo Hospital, Balashov Uyezd (March 20, 1909 — September 6, 1910). The report was dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor P.I. Dyakonov, noting that he had learned much from him during their brief association at the Imperial Moscow University. The report was made following the example of publications by Dyakonov, who considered it extremely important to generalize his experience of observing patients and make it accessible to his fellow doctors. From this report, we know, that over the course of a year and a half, Dr. V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky performed 515 surgical operations at the Romanov Zemstvo Hospital, continued searching for new methods of pain relief, and

was one of the first to use novocaine in Russia and laid the foundations for his scientific work on surgery [6].

Subsequently, publication of regular reports on his activities in the Zemstvo Hospitals was taken as a rule by the surgeon Voyno-Yasenetsky. From these publications one can learn a lot not only about his medical and scientific activities, but also about his contribution to the organization of healthcare and the development of his medical ethics. In the Balashov Uyezd, Valentin Felixovich continued to care not only about improving the organization of the treatment process, but also about improving the qualifications of zemstvo doctors and the effective exchange of experience between them. Just a few months after taking office, in August 1909, he spoke at a meeting of the Balashov Zemstvo Uyezd Council and tried to convince the zemstvo authorities of the need to create a medical library at the council, where leading medical journals, including foreign ones, would be subscribed to, so that doctors would be aware of the latest scientific news. Moreover, the surgeon insisted on the publication of annual reports on the activities of the Romanov Zemstvo Hospital at the expense of the zemstvo, so that it would be possible to conduct scientific processing of case histories and exchange clinical experience between doctors. Apparently, this proposal was not supported, since the publication of the “Report on the surgical activities of the Romanov Zemstvo Hospital...” was carried out only in 1916, during Valentin Felixovich’s work in Pereslavl, and apparently at his own expense, in the same printing house of the Vladimir Uyezd Zemstvo Council, where reports on his work during the Pereslavl period were printed.

Dr. Voyno-Yasenetsky also proposed to organize a pathological anatomy museum, which would serve the purpose of training local doctors and help to reduce the number of medical errors. Of the three proposals, only one was responded to — about organizing a library. His two other proposals were rejected by the zemstvo authorities, which led the surgeon to decisive conclusions about his future path.

Trying to implement in a provincial town the goals set in Professor Dyakonov’s clinic, according to the model adopted in one of the best medical educational institutions in Russia, the outstanding surgeon and aspiring healthcare managers suffered more failures than successes, which



Fig. 1. View of Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital. 1910s. From the collection of Pereslavl-Zalesky Historical, Architectural and Art Museum Reserve

Рис. 1. Вид Переславской земской больницы. 1910-е годы. Из собрания Переславль-Залесского Историко-архитектурного и художественного музея-заповедника

caused conflicts. And so he submitted his resignation letter in August 1910 and decided to participate in the competition for the position of head of the Pereslavl Zemstvo Uyezd Hospital (Fig. 1).

CHIEF PHYSICIAN OF THE PERESLAVSKAYA ZEMSTVO HOSPITAL

After the competition results were analysed, in November 1910, the medical commission at the Pereslavl Uyezd Zemstvo administration decided to invite Doctor V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky, giving him preference over several other candidates. Several factors contributed to his appointment: not only his renown as a physician, his publications in medical journals, his presentations at surgical society meetings, and his scholarly works, but also the endorsement of the hospital's former chief physician, F.G. Butkevich. In November 13, 1910, he attended the meeting of the Medical Commission at the Pereslavl Zemstvo, where V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky was selected to lead the Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital [7].

The position of head, that is, the chief physician of the hospital, promised greater opportunities. However, at first glance, the new place of work of the chief physician Voyno-Yasenetsky was little different from the previous ones.

Twelve years before his arrival in Pereslavl, the hospital looked like this: "...There was only one hospital in the entire district. It was housed in a two-story stone building with a mezzanine and had 25 beds (though the number of patients often reached 50)... There was a severe shortage of supplies, medicine, and almost no surgical instruments; the latrines were cold and filled the hospital wards with a foul stench... The hospital building... includes... a separate operating room and a bathroom. There was no maternity ward or syphilis department" [8].

In 1910, the Pereslavl Uyezd Zemstvo Hospital was responsible for 442 settlements with a population of 114,000 people. And the Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital only increased the number of beds, there were 65, which was certainly not enough. The hospital was served by only two doctors — a therapist and a surgeon, that is, the head doctor Voyno-Yasenetsky had to do all the surgical work. There was no other surgeon in the entire district! At the same time, he also had a lot of administrative work: a year before he took office, in December 1909, two barracks where the outpatient clinic and pharmacy were located burned down, after the fire only the foundations remained. Significant shortcomings were the lack of a disinfection chamber, the dilapidated

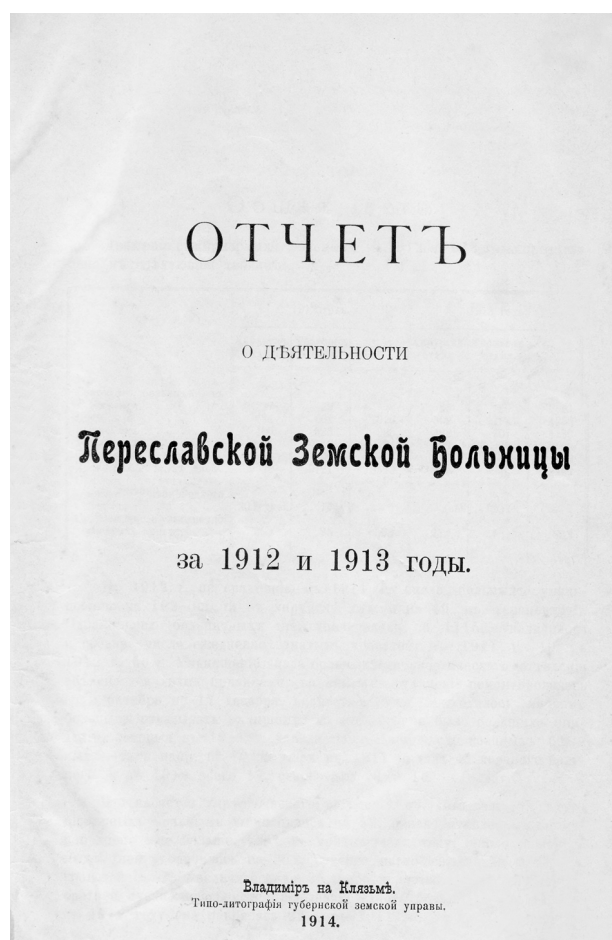


Fig. 2. Cover from the “Report on the activities of Pereslavl-Zemstvo Hospital during 1912–1913”. From the collection of Pereslavl-Zalessky Historical, Architectural and Art Museum Reserve

Рис. 2. Обложка из «Отчета о деятельности Переславской-Земской больницы за 1912–1913 гг.». Из собрания Переславль-Залесского историко-архитектурного и художественного музея-заповедника

condition of the infectious barracks — an old and cramped wooden building, more like a village hut than a medical institution. There was no central water supply in the hospital, concrete cesspools were emptied daily by a cesspool truck on wheels. The wards were lit by kerosene lamps, so it was possible to operate comfortably only in the operating room with large windows facing north, where the lighting was quite satisfactory during the daytime.

In the very first published Report on the Activities of the Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital for 1912–1913, the chief physician V.F. Voino-Yasenetsky was forced to justify to the zemstvo authorities the necessity of electric lighting: “Electric lighting in the operating room...

is not a luxury, as it might seem at first glance. Lighting the operating room with kerosene lamps poses a significant danger to both the patient and all participants in the surgery, as the combination of chloroform vapors with the gaseous products of burning kerosene and alcohol produces a highly toxic carbonyl chloride (phosgene)” (Fig. 2) [9].

The transformations that Valentin Felixovich began to implement in the hospital concerned primarily surgical activity. Firstly, the number of operations increased significantly: during 1911, it actually doubled compared to the previous year. 1056 surgical interventions were performed, including outpatient ones (Fig. 3).

Secondly, measures were taken to improve hand disinfection during surgery. A special washbasin appeared in the pre-operative room of the surgical department, with the help of which hand washing was carried out «according to the Dyakonov system»: potassium-oleic soap, boiled water, then hands were wiped with gauze soaked in 95% alcohol. New surgeon also implemented the rule to use medical gloves during the surgery. The third innovation was the installation of the Braun anesthesia apparatus in the operating room, with the help of which they began to carry out ether-chloroform anesthesia according to the latest word in medical science at that time. Valentin Felixovich, caring about the effectiveness of the medical care provided by the hospital, constantly analyzed the reasons that reduced it. In 1912, he wrote: “The number of inpatients in the surgical department decreased by 53, but the department was more overcrowded than in the previous year, the number of hospital days increased by 322... This can be explained by the increase in the average length of stay of one patient in the department... this increase in turn depended on two reasons: the increase in the number of patients requiring very long-term treatment, and the decrease in the number of eye patients who did not stay in the hospital for long.” He also suggests allocating a separate room for venereal patients: “No less urgent, no less important is the need for the department for venereal patients... for whom there is not a single bed in the entire district... This must be changed; in such a situation it is impossible to leave those who have had the misfortune to fall ill with syphilis...” [9].

It was not entirely usual in those years for the chief physician to demand that a maternity ward be created at the hospital: after all, at that time most women, including his wife Anna

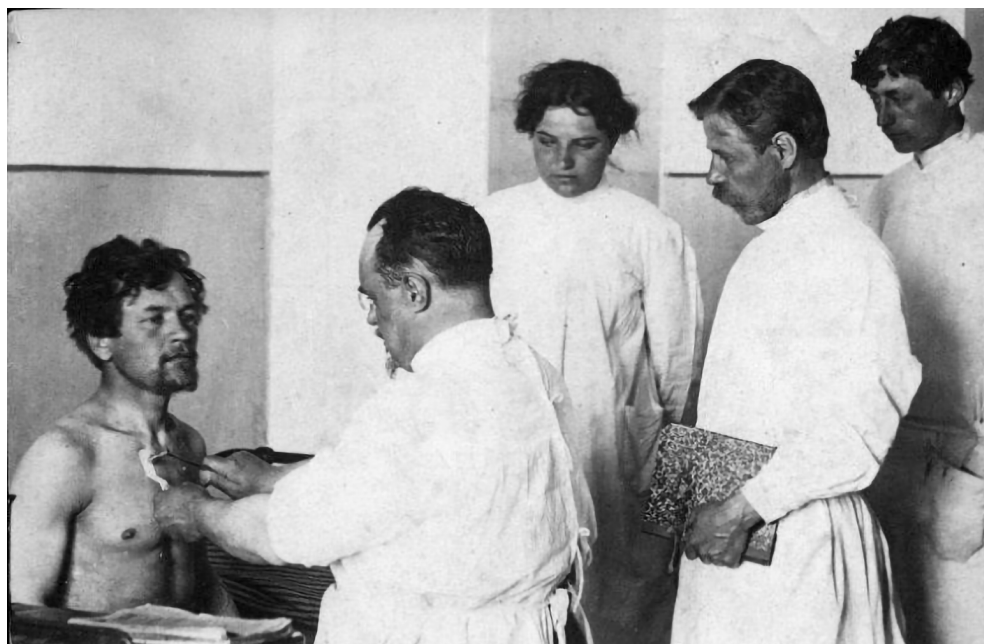


Fig. 3. Doctor V.F. Voyno-Yasenetsky examines a patient. 1913. From the collection of Pereslavl-Zalessky Historical, Architectural and Art Museum Reserve

Рис. 3. Доктор В.Ф. Войно-Ясенецкий осматривает пациента. 1913 год. Из собрания Переславль-Залесского историко-архитектурного и художественного музея-заповедника

Vasilyevna, gave birth at home. However, the surgeon Voyno-Yasenetsky, who was already several decades ahead of the medical ethics of his time and was guided in his work by evangelical priorities, formulated his position as follows: “A maternity ward is also necessary... since it is impossible to refuse admission to a pregnant prisoner, a city servant, a homeless city resident, or a passerby woman” [9].

Valentin Felixovich thought publications “Reports on the activities of the Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital” a very important matter not only for his region. Few time ago, several of his letters from 1914 to Dr. Alexander Vasilyevich Smirnov, a member of the Vladimir Scientific Archival Commission, historian and archivist, publisher of the Medical and Sanitary Chronicle, were found about the possibility of publishing the “Reports” for 1912–1913 in an appendix to this publication. Dr. Voyno-Yasenetsky expressed his opinion about the importance of these publications, calling them “a matter of considerable social and zemstvo importance, because such reports can serve as important material for resolving the large and pressing issue of the significance of provincial zemstvo hospitals... they can also be important in matters of managing medicine in the districts, about cent-

ralization or decentralization, they can encourage competition between zemstvos and doctors that is useful for the cause, and finally, I dare to think, from a purely clinical point of view they can be of interest to readers of the “chronicle” [10]. In these letters Valentin Felixovich is presented as already formed healthcare manager. His scale of thought goes far beyond the Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital entrusted to him.

In the years of Dr. Voyno-Yasenetsky’s work in Pereslavl-Zalessky as a doctor at an outpatient clinic in the village of Kabanskoye, N.A. Gundobin, who took on the difficult role of popularizing healthcare, performed medical social meetings in 7 villages. Enthusiast in medical education told the peasants (the audience consisted of 100–250 people in every village) about prevention of different infectious diseases, the dangers of alcohol abuse, treatment of syphilis and scabies, and also showed some simple experiments, which delighted the village children [11]. Since the lectures of Gundobin were basically about the therapeutic diseases, we do not know about any participation of Dr. Voyno-Yasenetsky, but It is difficult to imagine that he remained indifferent to the medical education of peasants in the villages from which patients came to him.

As the chief physician, Valentin Felixovich constantly sought to improve the working conditions of doctors and the care of patients in his hospital at meetings of the medical commission at the Pereslavl Uyezd zemstvo administration. Among them, he was a secretary and only one surgeon. His authority and persistence in achieving his goals allowed him to obtain funds from the zemstvo for many reforms. He also opened a fee-paying ward with improved conditions for wealthy patients and used these funds to improve the lives of other patients.

All of these changes made the Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital unrecognizable just a year after he took office.

Caring for people suffering from the lack of medical care, V. F. Voyno-Yasenetsky put forward several proposals for organizing healthcare in the district at meetings of the medical commission and the district zemstvo assembly. It was necessary to organize another surgical department in the Zemstvo Hospital furthest from Pereslavl, and in the remaining district hospitals — dressing rooms and small, well-equipped operating rooms. In which way the chief surgeon of Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital wanted to provide medical care in these points, which required more than one hour of horse riding to get to? Where did he want to find enough surgeons? The answer: he based only on his own forces. Surgical treatments in district clinics and in the remote surgical department Voyno-Yasenetsky was going to carry out independently, regularly making rounds to perform planned operations and training local doctors to assist him. “Instead of breeding small surgeons, it is better to have one good one and call him to the areas for operations”, — he said decisively [12]. Unfortunately, his proposal was not supported.

In 1912–1913, the chief physician and surgeon successfully build new hospital buildings (Fig. 4). In the first half of 1914, a new department for infectious diseases was opened. Dr. Voyno-Yasenetsky repeatedly pointed out the need of such department for reports to the zemstvo authorities. The “new contagious barrack” had 16 beds and was divided into two parts, which, however, due to a lack of staff, were served by only one nurse. Previous infectious diseases department with 8 beds, as the chief physician planned, treated also venereal disease. In the new brick building a disinfection chamber and laundry were located, and in the extension there was a motor with a pump and water tanks to meet the needs of the hospital.



Fig. 4. Current appearance of the operating room of Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital. Photo by the author in 2015

Рис. 4. Современный вид операционного корпуса Переславской земской больницы. Фото автора 2015 года

Funding for these works was finally obtained from the Zemstvo. However, in vain did Valentin Felixovich hope for the fulfillment of his long-standing dream: the purchase of an X-ray for the hospital. By the way, Dr. Voyno-Yasenetsky “thanks to the enlightened responsiveness of Varvara Sergeevna Varentsova, a representative of the local merchant class, the daughter of one of the richest Pereslavl manufacturers of Pavlov, he found a means to get an X-ray in another way [13].

These plans were interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. It became impossible to acquire an X-ray, which was then purchased only in Germany. The war changed the rhythm of the hospital’s work. Its employees were called up to the active army, and from August 20, a small zemstvo hospital was organized in the hospital, with the same chief physician as its head.

Situated far from the railway and evacuation routes from the front to the rear, the Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital did not work too hard. During all the war years, around 100 wounded soldiers were treated there. However, Valentin Felixovich

noted, that “due to wartime conditions, the hospital worked very hard” not only because of “these figures also included lower ranks evacuated from the theater of military operations”, but also due to 20 beds intended for the wounded were never empty, and “at the first opportunity, they dealt with ordinary patients”. Also in the hospital, “the number of beds increased... to 84 due to the opening of a 16-bed infectious lazaretto for those evacuated from the theater of operations; these beds were equipped with funds from the Union of Cities and placed in a new infectious barracks, the capacity of which was increased to 24”. However, he effectively organized this work, despite the difficult conditions. Valentin Felixovich even complained that “few wounded were evacuated to Pereslavl, and only those for whom transportation 20 versts from the railway was not difficult. One cannot help but regret this, since the Pereslavl hospital would have been able to treat the seriously wounded to a much greater extent than many hospitals located along railway lines, but which do not have specialist surgeons” [14].

During these years, he completed his research on regional anesthesia and brilliantly defended his doctoral dissertation at the Imperial Moscow University on April 30, 1916. In this article, there is no need to recall the scientific and medical significance of this work, which made his

name a widely known surgeon of the Russian Empire and has not lost its significance today. Academician Yu. L. Shevchenko, the biographer of St. Luke, considers the Pereslavl period to be the finest hour of the surgeon V.F. Voino-Yasnetsky's work (Fig. 5) [15].

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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ДОПОЛНИТЕЛЬНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ

Автор прочитал и одобрил финальную версию перед публикацией.

Конфликт интересов. Автор декларирует отсутствие явных и потенциальных конфликтов интересов, связанных с публикацией настоящей статьи.

Источник финансирования. Автор заявляет об отсутствии внешнего финансирования при проведении исследования.

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Fig. 5. The memorial plaque on the building of Pereslavl Zemstvo Hospital was installed in 2010. Photo by O. Koroleva

Рис. 5. Памятная доска на здании Переславской земской больницы, установленная в 2010 году. Фото О. Королева

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