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Problems of Soviet Medicine in Readers' Letters in Connection with the Interview of Minister B. V. Petrovsky to Literaturnaya Gazeta (1974): Documents from the Fonds of the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History

Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem that remains virtually unknown to the scholarship, i.e. the ordinary citizens' assessment of the quality of late-Soviet medical system. It is to introduce into scientific use and to analyze a complex of letters from the readers of several Soviet newspapers concerning the state of Soviet health care system, which were received in response to the Soviet Minister of Health B. V. Petrovsky's interview to the Literaturnaya Gazeta in the spring of 1974. The letters were deposited in the fond of the Central Committee of the CPSU in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). The interview aroused great interest among its readers, as evidenced by numerous letters received in Soviet newspapers and transmitted to the Central Committee of the CPSU. The authors of many letters were critical of the existing health care system in the USSR. They complained of lack of information about treatment, lack of medicines, poor conditions in hospitals and clinics (especially in rural areas), lack of modern medical devices, and insufficient number of ambulances. Some letters defended non-traditional methods of treatment, homeopathy in particular. A special group consisted of complaints about violations of medical ethics: negligence of doctors, their rudeness and callousness, and "impunity" of doctors who committed medical errors. The letters described cases of doctors' inaction that resulted in patient's death. Some letters called for authorizing fee-for-service medicine and providing a right to choose one's doctor. The deluge of letters prompted inspection at the highest level. Employees of the Department of Science and Educational Institutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU and those of the Ministry of Health confirmed most described facts. Following the inspection resolutions were prepared in order to improve the quality of medical personnel's work. The article concludes that the analyzed letters complex demonstrates problems of the Soviet health care system and population's dissatisfaction with it, and, furthermore, calls for public discussion and serious reform.

Keywords

Apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Ministry of Health of the USSR, Soviet health

system, B. V. Petrovsky, medical ethics.

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