

BEGINNINGS OF SOCIAL MEDICINE AND LABOUR MEDICINE IN ROMANIA

Cristina Ionescu

”Gr.T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi

The influence of external environment on human body was noticed since ancient times. Hippocrate made some written observations on the influence of outer world (climate, geographical area, waters, wind, diet, social system) upon the human being, in other words of macrocosms on the microcosmos.

During the past centuries, subsequent to industrial revolution, development of agriculture, diversification of crafts and occurrence of new social classes, the diseases caused by noxious agents, inadequate diet or consumption of altered food and physical exhaustion due to the long work program of 10-12 hours appeared.

The worsening of the population health, demographic decline, physical and mental underdeveloped individuals, some with genetic defects, spread of tuberculosis, pellagra and syphilis drew the attention of physicians. Thus, at the end of the XIXth century, and especially during the first decades of the XXth century, in speeches, conferences and published papers some preventive measures had been suggested. Thus, *Mihai Manicatide*, professor at the Iași Faculty of Medicine, published in “*Viața Românească*” (issue 6, 1907) the paper entitled “Social medicine”, where he presented the everyday life of workers and the

prospects of health care in the industrial environment. In this respect, he made some suggestions such as: a shorter working day, health education programmes– diet education, mothers’ education. Being a pediatrician, M. Manicatide estimated that the workers’ children were those who suffered more from the poor living conditions. His constant concern in this matter was demonstrated by his assertion in 1912 that out of 100 recruits, only four presented a normal nutritional state. In 1913, in a statistics on mortality rate in Moldova, he mentioned that 50,000 deaths were recorded among infants.

Two decades earlier, in Iași, Dr. *Ștefan Stîncă*, by his papers “Social environment as pathological factor”, “Papers on pathology and pathogenesis in various historical periods”, and “Dialectics in medicine” brought new grounds in the field of social medicine. These were a stimulating view for the medical community in that time, unfamiliar with a medical-social concept in the interpretation of the pathological phenomenon. Dr. Panait Zosin said that St. Stîncă “was the first one in our country who included the social aspect in the genesis of diseases”. As recognition of his pioneer’s work and value, Victor Babeș published in “Medical Romania”,

journal whose editor he was, Stîncă's work entitled "Papers on pathology and pathogenesis in various historical periods".

Although Șt. Stîncă's view was received with hostility and reticence by some medical circles, personalities like Victor Babeș, Iacob Felix, Petri-Paul, and Ludovic Russ were sensitized by it. Thus, *Victor Babeș* admitted the social interpretation in the genesis of some epidemics. In 1924, occasioned by an epidemic outbreak of cholera, he stated: "The poor health of the lower classes is primarily due to the unjust lack of means to cover the most primitive health and life needs, and secondly to the inadequate involvement of the Government both in supporting the Institute of Hygiene and providing a good health care to each individual. Thus, finding a solution to the social problems is essential for public health".

Iacob Felix directed attention to the economic and social real causes of health and demographic problems so common especially in the rural population of Romania. He was particularly concerned with the degeneration of our nation, result of poverty and poor living conditions, factor predisposing the weakened body to diseases.

Gh. Marinescu advocated the same idea. He said "modern medicine does not care the individual out of the society he/she lives in, but aims at protecting the whole society from various diseases and improving the human race..... as one of the most common causes of disease in an

individual is the social background and medicine has to be concerned with all causes of diseases" (reception speech at the Romanian Academy, March 10, 1906).

A few years later, professors from other universities adhered to this concept: N. Petrescu – Comnen, N.C. Alexandrescu– Galați, G. Stănculescu, D. Mihail, Maximilian Sanielevici, V. Madgearu. They warned that tuberculosis, pellagra, syphilis, alcoholism are true social diseases.

Going beyond the borders of social medicine in through research of the new pathology, the studies on occupational diseases and the role of the various occupations in their causation became imminent. Between 1908 and 1909, *N. Petrescu Comnen* and *N.C Alexa* made some studies of labour medicine. In the papers "Work accident" and "Work Inspection", Petrescu Comnen made a deeply medical-social analysis. *Alexandrescu-Galați* in his article "Industry and hygiene" stated: "In Romania, hygiene in the industrial environment is totally unknown. Thousands of workers become victims of exploitation. The employment law has to regulate the hygienic conditions". *Dr. Virgil Madgearu* approached the same topic in his reference article "Workers protection in Romania".

In 1912, *Dr. Petre Cazacu* published an article on "Workers' health insurance", very critical against employers.

At the same time, labour protection became another concern. A good example in this respect is the article by *Dr. Maximilian Sanielevici*, entitled

BEGINNINGS OF SOCIAL MEDICINE AND LABOUR MEDICINE IN ROMANIA

“Considerations on the prevention of labour accidents”.

Alcoholism, with its devastating effects, was common both among rural farmers, and urban population. Doctors could not stay aside, and started a sustained campaign against alcohol abuse. “The European war against alcoholism” by *Dr. D. Tatuşescu* is one of the numerous published articles on this topic.

Dr. G. Strat, in his article entitled “A new employment law. Labour regulation for minors and women. Eight-hour work day” drew attention on the discrepancy between Romania and the developed countries where all the above mentioned aspects had been solved more than half a century ago.

In 1934, *I. Irimescu* wrote in “*Viața Românească*” that “the poor work conditions are directly responsible for the occurrence of alcoholism among the malnourished workers who work over 10 hours a day”.

At the beginning of the XXth century, the words of the great scientist Gh. Marinescu, synthesize the role of social medicine “which will reform humanity in a remote future, building on the ruins of a society undermined by all sorts of miseries and diseases a

new, healthier and cleaner society (reception speech at the Romanian Academy, November 10, 1906).

Unfortunately, the same is almost true in nowadays Romania, where the poor people of society feel most dramatically the effects of precarious social conditions.

REFERENCES

1. C. Romanescu, Cristina Ionescu - *Probleme de igiena muncii în “Viața Românească”*. Din trecutul medicinei în România. Ed. Medicală, București, 1971.
2. C. Romanescu, Cristina Ionescu - *Opera lui Ștefan Stîncă în gîndirea medicală românească*. Pagini Medico-Istorice, Iași, 1973, 31.
3. Victor Babeș - *Prejudițiile sanitare din punct de vedere al științelor sanitare*. Prelegeri Hipocratice. Ed. Viața Medicală Românească, București, 1999, 56.
4. Iacob Felix - *Despre progresele igienei din cei din urmă ani*. Ed. Viața Medicală Românească, București, 1999, 18
5. Thoma Ionescu - *Starea sanitară a României*. Cuvîntare în Camera Deputaților (27 ianuarie 1906). Ed. Viața Medicală Românească, București, 1999, 66