

# HISTORICAL SCIENCES

## ACTIVITIES OF THE RED CROSS AND THE RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES IN HOSPITALS OF THE SOUTH URALS (1941-1945 YEARS)

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### Abstract

The article reveals the main lines of work of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies in hospitals in the South Urals during the Great Patriotic War. The author shows how South Ural branches trained the societies of middle and junior medical personnel – nurses and Voluntary Aid Detachment members, propagandized and implemented the donor movement, trained the population in first aid techniques. Particular attention is paid to the patronage assistance of the hospitals in the South Urals.

**Keywords:** the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies, hospitals, patronage, donorship, healthcare personnel.

In the treatment of the wounded and sick soldiers of the Red Army, the final success largely depended on the work of medical personnel: doctors, nurses, sanitary squads, orderlies - and their professional training.

The final success in the treatment of the wounded and sick soldiers of the Red Army largely depended on the work and vocational training of medical personnel: doctors, nurses, Voluntary Aid Detachment members, medical orderlies. During the Great Patriotic War, more than 200 thousand doctors and 500 thousand nurses worked in hospitals and other military medical institutions. They cured over 10 million wounded soldiers. [1, p.3] In his memoirs, E.I. Smirnov – the head of the Main Military Medical Directorate – noted: “a doctor, a paramedic, a nurse, a medical orderly and an orderly-porter in a war is not a new phenomenon. But their role and significance increased unprecedentedly in the Great Patriotic War 1941 – 1945 which has drawn tens of millions of people into its process.” [2, p.8]

The medical personnel gap problem was crucial during the War. At the beginning of the War, the number of doctors in the USSR was 155 thousand people, of these, 62% were women, a sizeable proportion - the aged, as well as other people who were difficult to use in military medicine. [3, p. 5; 585 - 586] On the eve of the war medical facilities of the Red Army were only 77% staffed with doctors. In addition, a qualified healthcare personnel was necessary for evacuation hospitals which had been formed in the rear. In the first days of the War the situation became even harder due to the conscription of the most experienced doctors into the armed forces. In general, South Urals Healthcare Service lacked healthcare personnel and nurses due to several reasons. In the first month of the War, over 350 nurses and 250 Voluntary Aid Detachment members went to the battlefield from the Chkalovsk region. [4, p.19] During the War, 750 doctors and 2 thousand nurses left the Chelyabinsk region along with hospitals. [5, f. 73, l. 96-97]

The conscription of doctors and nurses into the armed forces along with continuous repositioning of evacuation hospitals together with their healthcare personnel demanded their correct disposition. The Red

Cross and the Red Crescent Societies were involved in patronage and sanitary work.

Even in peacetime the Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had been preparing middle and junior medical personnel – nurses and so called Voluntary Aid Detachment members. According to the pre-war order, the first of them were trained on special courses of varying duration: one and a half year courses for female workers with incomplete secondary education (on the job); one-year courses for female students (on the job) or women who were unemployed and had a seven-year education; eleven-month courses for wives of commanding and political staff of Red Army. The training program was designed to train nurses for casualty evacuation in the field and for serving in evacuation hospitals in the rear or in the hospital trains. Voluntary Aid Detachment members were being trained for 2 months (on the job) in training medical units. They were trained from female workers and employees of Soviet enterprises and institutions. The courses' attendees were getting knowledge and skills in first aid and caring for the wounded and sick in hospitals and hospital trains. [6, p.56; p.34; p.26 –29]

The regional committee of the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks) (AUCP (b)) of South Urals tasked the Russian Red Cross (RRC) committees to become the source of sanitary personnel. Thus, on June 30, 1941 Chelyabinsk regional party committee have charged the Red Cross regional committee, the Public Health Administration and the city committees to maximize training courses for nurses and Voluntary Aid Detachment members and to organize medical defense study groups at enterprises, institutions and on collective farms. In the Chkalovsk region, the mass training of nurses and VAD members for the army and hospitals began at the beginning of the war.

45 Ready for Medical Defense (RMD) study groups with 1200 students had been working in Chkalov by July 4, 1941. By the specified date, 13 study groups with 400 students and 6 voluntary aid detachments with 210 members were added to 250 nurses in training. [8, f.76, l.8] On grounds of March 11, 1942

order of the People's Commissariat for Health, the Voluntary Aid Detachment members and nurses trained by the Russian Red Cross (RRC) were added to evacuation hospitals staff. Also reserve nurses and VAD members of RRC were overstaffed. [9, f.424, l.310] According to the Documentation Centre of contemporary history of the Orenburg region, the Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies trained 3946 of nurses, 7961 VAD members, 854 orderlies, 348 medical instructors, 316046 people with a RMD badge and 93643 people with a BRMD (Be Ready for Medical Defense) badge in Chkalovsk region during the Great Patriotic War. [10, f.777, l.13; p.61 - 62]

Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Soviet Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies highly praised the work of South Urals Red Cross committees. Thus, out of 29 Red Cross regional committees, the Chelyabinsk RRC regional committee won the 1943 First of May Socialist emulation in preparing healthcare personnel. [11, f.183, l. 21; p. 15]

To advance professional knowledge, the Public Health Administration together with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies regional committees and sanitary departments of military districts organized training courses directly at the hospitals. This allowed to constantly look after the wounded and trained profile medical personnel. Only in the first year of the war, on the training and requalification courses at the evacuation hospitals 61% of medical personnel learnt their trade. During that time, 180 nursing conferences with 199 nursing reports and numerous doctors' speeches were held at the hospitals. [12, f.9, l.21; p.20 - 21]

Due to specialization change of hospitals and their departments there was a need for a rapid training in those specializations that have not been highly developed in the prewar times (physiotherapy, exercise therapy and other). About 1000 women completed surgical nurse, plaster cast application technique, physiotherapy, exercise therapy and dietetic nutrition courses in evacuation hospitals of Chelyabinsk region alone. [13, f.94, l.16]

The evacuation hospitals department conducted theoretical and practical tuition for middle and junior medical personnel annually. Thus, in Chkalovsk region 3343 nurses and 5000 medical orderlies were trained in 1941 – 1945. [14, f.148, l.129]

Trade unions actively participated in the training of healthcare personnel.

On July 2, 1941 All-Union Central Council of Trade-Unions secretariat signed the act "On the work of trade unions for the training of nurses and Voluntary Aid Detachment members". The regional, city, industrial and local committees supported these measures. In a lead article Soviet trade union newspaper "Trud" urged: "Treat the training of medical personnel as a national, political mission!" South Urals trade unions together with health authorities and Red Cross organized study groups and short-term courses for nurse and Voluntary Aid Detachment members training. Classes were held in shifts, taking into account operational requirement. Thus, Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works factory committee organized the nursing training in three shifts. [15, p.1; f.14, l.4]

The komsomol members helped party and trade unions organizations in medical personnel training. On June 23, 1941 the Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League signed the act "On measures for military work in the komsomol" which obligated the regional, city and district committees be directly involved nursing training.

To coordinate the work on nursing training the party committees had been conducting meetings with party, komsomol, soviet and trade union organizations as well as with health authorities. At one of such meetings in December 1941 at the Chelyabinsk city committee of the AUCP (b) they discussed issues of training work in nursing courses, formed recommendations for RRC training unit. [16, p.1]

Patronage over hospitals became widespread during the War. The patrons were plants and factories, collective farms, public, economic organizations and cultural and educational institutions.

Red Cross organizations were the patrons for hospitals throughout the Great Patriotic War. For instance, in September 1941 Chelyabinsk region committee of the AUCP (b) bureau have charged RRC region committee to make primary organizations act as a patron to hospitals, departments and chambers. According to Chelyabinsk city committee, in 1944 alone 144 Red Cross primary organizations served 158 chambers. During the War over 5 thousand Voluntary Aid Detachment members were on call daily in hospitals of Chelyabinsk. Among them were underscored A.P. Sushkova, A.I. Golovizina, V.P. Revyagina and others. [17, f.769, l. 3ob]

In Chkalovsk region thirty Red Cross district committees administered the wounded in evacuation hospitals. In the first half of 1945 alone, 88 primary organizations washed 12 085 pieces of linen, sewed 2093 pieces of clothes, collected 150 shoes and pieces of underclothing and 1800 rubles. [18, p.2]

Specific attention was paid to patronage over the chambers of the seriously wounded. Nikova, the chairman of one of the RRC primary chapters, had organized 47 Voluntary Aid Detachment members to constantly be on call at the beds of the seriously wounded, feed and look after them. [19, f.59, l.44]

The activists of the Society were awarded by command with honorary badge for the good organization of patronage. In 1944 in Chelyabinsk region, the Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies awarded V. V. Knyazev and Petrov, the Secretaries of party organization, Schulman, the plant director, Yashchenko and Golebeva, Red Cross activists of Chelyabinsk GRES, with honorary badge "Excellence in sanitary defence of USSR". [20, f.332, l.33]

The organization of the donor movement became a great merit of the Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The committee of the Societies together with health authorities launched a wide propaganda of blood donation among the population. They did their best to provide the rear hospitals with donor blood. 1500 women wished to become donors in July 1941 in the Chkalovsk region. But by the end of the year there were 4681 donors in the region. In 1941 – 1945 in the Chkalovsk region were 8000 blood donors of Red

Cross in total. For example, homemakers of Buzuluk railway junction Shatikova and Kurpanova donated 4 liters of blood. In total during the War in Buzuluk were up to 400 blood donors. In March 1942 110 staff members of USSR Supreme Court evacuated from Moscow to Chkalov belonged to RRC and 70 were blood donors. [21, file 146, l.47; f.777, l.29; f.174, l.45 - 46]

Thus, during the Great Patriotic War, South Urals branch of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies put in a lot of effort. It administered the wounded, trained the population in first aid techniques, trained healthcare personnel for the army and hospitals, organized patronage assistance and the donor movement.

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