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Emergence of Higher Medical Education for Women in Russia in 1860–1910

In the second half of the 19th century, a revision of traditional views on the role of women in social life began in Russian intellectual circles. The issue of higher education for women was openly voiced for the first time in December 1867, during the first congress of natural scientists, when E.I. Conradi made a presentation stating the need of opening educational courses for women.

The problem of increased emigration of Russian women in order to obtain higher education attracted the attention of Russian medical community and the government. The first four-year higher medical courses for women were opened in 1872 at the Imperial Medical and Surgical Academy St. Petersburg under the name of advanced courses for midwives. The Academy was administered by the Minister of War D.A. Milyutin. The courses were funded by voluntary contributions and tuition fees. In 1876, advanced midwives' courses were renamed to women's medical courses and the fifth year was added to the curriculum. As a result, the courses were equated to the main program of the Academy.

In 1877, the Russo—Turkish war began. Approximately a half of students of female medical courses went to the war front. The rest of women had decided to finish their education. On 7 of February 1878, graduates received certificates from the Chancellery of the Nikolaev military hospital, certifying that they had finished their studies at medical courses, yet without indicating their medical degree. Until 1883, female doctors practiced informally, being completely dependent on the authorities.

The work of the first female doctors was of particular importance in surgical and gynecological care of women, in the fight against the spread of syphilis and other diseases. Female patients who could not attend a doctor of opposite sex due to religious beliefs finally could get help from a qualified female specialist.

In 1881, D.A. Milyutin left his post, and the War Ministry did not consider it necessary to support women's courses at the Academy. In 1882, women's medical courses were abolished. January 4, 1883, the women who have completed education in female medical courses were assigned the title of a midwife in the report of the Minister of Internal Affairs. The name was changed to “doctor of women and children” on February 18. It was replaced with the title of “female doctor” only in 1896.

The cessation of female medical courses was only a temporary hindrance to medical education for Russian women. In a short period of time sympathy groups

raised an amount of 700,000 rubles to support functioning of the new medical courses. On September 14, 1897, Russian medical community succeeded in creating the Women's Medical Institute in St. Petersburg, which became the first institution of such kind in Russia. In 1906, medical departments were opened at the Higher Women's Courses in Moscow and Odessa. 1909 is the year of foundation of the Moscow Women's Medical Institute. In 1910, the Kharkov Women's Medical Institute was opened.

Overall, it may be said that higher medical education for women in Russia was developed from the ground up owing to the support of Russian intellectual community and educational and career aspirations of Russian women in the context of economic and social changes in the country. After many years of struggle for the right to study medicine Russian women not only got access to higher medical education, but also changed public attitude to the role of women in society.

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