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## **Syphilis Issue and Fight with Prostitution in 1890s Tartu**

Syphilis was one of the most common infectious diseases of the 19th century, and it was closely linked to prostitution, especially in the cities. The struggle against both scourges had been for centuries, but in the the turn of the 19th and 20th century was the culmination of the spread of both syphilis and prostitution in many European countries, including Russian Empire. In 1895, the Russian Ministry of the Interior began preparations to convene an All-Russian Congress Against Syphilis. Tartu city doctor dr. Ströhmborg will write a presentation for Congress in which he will give his vision of what needs to be done to combat syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases. What's better, he also gives an overview of the situation in Tartu.

An All-Russian Conference Against Syphilis was held in St. Petersburg, at the Medical Office of the Ministry of the Interior, from January 15 to 22, 1897. The request to convene a congress had been submitted to the emperor by the Minister of the Interior on March 16, 1895 and the organizing work began. Hundreds of doctors from all over Russia took part, and the Baltic provinces were also well represented. A lot of work in preparation was organized by Livonian Doctors' Days, each time with almost (or more than) a hundred participants from Livonia, St. Petersburg and elsewhere. Meetings were published in „St. Petersburg medicinsche Wochenschrift“ special editions.

The morning of the second day of the VII Livonian Doctors' Days in Cesis in 1895 was dedicated to the fight against syphilis. It was decided to publish a separate brochure to present their views on the fight against syphilis. For that brochure, dr. Ströhmborg compiled an overview of the situation in Tartu.

In 1851, all Russian cities were required to establish medical-police committees for supervision of prostitution. The most important task of the committee was to establish lists of public women. The second most important task was a medical examination of the women on the list by a city doctor. The city doctor was also responsible for checking the venereal diseases of factory workers and prisoners. Registered prostitutes were to be treated without fee in city the hospital. This was the order of the Ministry of the Interior in 1851. No funds were allocated to execute the order and there were great difficulties in complying with this request. In Central Russia provinces, where the hospitals were owned by local governments, progress was made. In areas of Poland where the hospital was in private hands, no. There were city hospitals in the Baltic provinces, but the money for free

treatment was distributed only to sexually and mentally ill people. The money for treatment was provided by the provincial treasury. Unfortunately, in Tartu, which belongs to the Livonian Governorate, only patients from the rural municipalities of the Livonian Governorate were treated free of charge. Those who came from further afield had to pay for themselves and hope that the home municipality will reimburse the bill.

City doctor Ströhmberg dealt extensively with prostitutes and took it to heart. One of the biggest victories for a city doctor was a separate reception point for public women with venereal diseases, with a medical department with 20 seats. The house, originally planned to fight cholera, was bought for 5,000 rubles from a former brothel owner, and there had previously been a brothel.

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