

Development of Preventive Medical Education in Latvia

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This year we are going to celebrated the centenary of our department. The first lecture on anatomy was read on February 2, 1920. One year later the Hygiene Institute was established at the Faculty of Medicine of the Higher School of Latvia and the Department of Hygiene was founded on August 15, which can be considered as the predecessor of the present RSU Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

The first Head of the Department was German professor Ernest Friedrich Alexander Ferman (1921-1939), followed by Viktors Milenbahs (1939-1944), Janis Maizite (1945-1950), Mihails Garbarenko (1952-1962) and Zinaida Lindberga (1962-1990). In 1990 Hygiene department was taken over by Professor M. Eglite and the training included also occupational courses, but the name of the Department until 1993 was Hygiene and Occupational Diseases Department.

The main task of our department is to develop students' skills of preventive medicine, occupational hazards, nutrition, air and water pollution. Since 1997, the Department has been named the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Environmental health training is based on the socio-hygienic and medical biological regularities in the system environment – human - society. For providing high quality training, several lecturers at the department took special courses in occupational and environmental medicine at Uppsala University in Sweden and improve their knowledge by participating in various seminars, courses, conferences in Latvia and abroad.

Department lecturers, having had a lot of research and practical work experience, lead studies in all the faculties. Training is provided with teaching aids written by the lecturers of the department - textbooks, booklets, video collections, modern equipment for practical classes. A new extensive textbook on environmental health written by all our lecturers has been published. The number of students who choose the Environmental and Occupational Medicine themes for their research papers is growing. In the last ten years Professor M. Eglite's book on occupational medicine has been published twice. Associated Professor J.I. Dundurs has written textbook on environmental and occupational medicine for foreign students.

The award of the State Order of the Three Stars to the Head of the department, Professor M. Eglite evidences the fact that Environmental and Occupational Medicine is valued highly by the State.

In the past 17 years hygiene training has gained good results on the way to developing a European single higher education system and quality assurance.