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THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY IN THE HISTORY OF MEDICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

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РОЛЬ ОСОБИСТОСТІ В ІСТОРІЇ МЕДИЧНОГО ПРОСВІТНИЦТВА

Abstract. The article is devoted to highlighting the historical path, directions, and significance of the educational activities of Ukrainian physicians in the late 19th and 20th centuries. It demonstrates how medical science expanded beyond private consulting rooms, transforming health protection into a public and national initiative through the integration of foundational knowledge with daily prevention, culture, and public health awareness. The synthesized experience of the Shevchenko Scientific Society (NTSh), the Ukrainian Medical Society (ULT), and the network of “Prosvita” reading rooms attests to the development of medical enlightenment across four key directions: sanitary and hygienic education alongside the fight against epidemics; maternal and child healthcare; the development of professional terminology and publishing; and the preservation of medico-historical memory and ethics. The initial stage of mass public health education in Ukrainian lands was associated with overcoming infectious diseases (typhus, cholera, tuberculosis) through the publication of pamphlets and the format of “loud reading” in rural reading rooms. A foundational contribution to the system was made by prominent figures: Yevhen Ozarkevych laid the ground for Ukrainian-language medical terminology, founded the journals *Likarskyi Zbirnyk* and *Zdorovlie*, and established the free outpatient clinic “Narodna Lichnytsia”; Academician Ivan Horbachevsky explained the fundamentals of nutritional hygiene and metabolism to the general public; Zenovii Levytskyi and Ovksemtii Korchak-Chepurkivskyi advanced preventive medicine, sanitary statistics, and anti-epidemic protection. The work of Feliks Selskyi contributed to reducing child and maternal mortality, overcoming popular superstitions, and introducing hygienic standards during childbirth. An important vector was the preservation of scientific heritage and ethics, realized in the works of diaspora and domestic scholars.

Keywords: Enlightenment; medical practice; medical heritage; sanitary and hygiene education; health protection.

Анотація. Статтю присвячено висвітленню історичного шляху, напрямів та значення просвітницької діяльності українських лікарів наприкінці XIX – у XX ст. Висвітлено, як медична наука вийшла за межі приватних кабінетів, перетворивши захист здоров'я на суспільну та національну справу завдяки поєднанню фундаментальних знань зі щоденною профілактикою, культурою та свідомістю громадян. Узагальнений досвід Наукового товариства ім. Шевченка (НТШ), Українського лікарського товариства (УЛТ) та мережі читальень «Просвіта» засвідчує розвиток медичного просвітництва у чотирьох ключових напрямках: санітарно-гігієнічна освіта й боротьба з епідеміями; охорона материнства й дитинства; розбудова фахової мови та видавнича справа; збереження історико-медичної пам'яті та деонтологія.

Початковий етап масової просвіти на українських землях пов'язаний із подоланням інфекцій через видання брошур і формат «голосного читання» у сільських читальнях. Фундаментальний внесок у систему зробили видатні діячі: Євген Озаркевич заклали основи україномовної медичної термінології, заснував часописи «Лікарський збірник», «Здоров'я»; академік Іван Горбачевський пояснив основи гігієни харчування й метаболізму для широкого загалу; Зеновій Левицький та Овксентій Корчак-Чепурківський розвинули профілактичну медицину й протиепідемічний захист; діяльність Фелікса Сельського сприяла зниженню дитячої та материнської смертності та впровадженню гігієнічних норм. Важливим вектором стало збереження наукової спадщини й деонтології, зреалізоване в працях діаспорних та вітчизняних науковців.

Ключові слова: просвітництво; лікарська практика; медична спадщина; санітарно-гігієнічна освіта; захист здоров'я.

Introduction. The educational activity of physicians is historically one of the most powerful movements through which medicine emerged from private consulting rooms to reach the public, transforming the struggle for health from

a personal issue into a social and national cause. The educational efforts of physicians served as a bridge between fundamental science and everyday human life. As a result, advanced medical knowledge became accessible to everyone, saving thousands of

lives through prevention, awareness, and a culture of health (Bilavych et al., 2020, p. 17).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the network of reading rooms of the “Prosvita” society became the main platform through which physician-educators (predominantly members of the Shevchenko Scientific Society [NTSh] and the Ukrainian Medical Society) gained direct access to the peasantry of Galicia and Bukovyna (Andreichyn, 2014, 16).

Synthesizing the experience of the Shevchenko Scientific Society and prominent 20th-century scholars, it can be asserted that medical enlightenment developed along four key vectors: Sanitary and hygienic education and the fight against epidemics, where the physician’s primary objective was both disease prevention and mitigating its consequences; Maternal and child healthcare; The development of scientific terminology and publishing; Medico-historical memory and ethics (deontology).

The objective of this article is to analyze the practical, scientific, and educational contributions of prominent figures in Ukrainian medicine (Yevhen Ozarkevych, Ivan Horbachevsky, Feliks Selsky, Ovkentii Korchak-Chepurkivsky, among others) toward raising the population’s sanitary standards, combating epidemics, and building Ukrainian-language medical science (Kachkan, 2020). Pavlo Pundii, Yaroslav Hanitkevych, Serhii Verkhtratskyi, and Vasyl Pliushch systematized the history of Ukrainian medicine, recovered the names of physicians repressed and silenced by the totalitarian regime, authored the first Ukrainian-language textbooks, and developed bio-bibliographic databases. The historical foundation of this tradition is the legacy of Yurii Drohobych (15th century) – the first Ukrainian Doctor of Medicine, who integrated domestic thought into the European scientific domain.

Theoretical Section. From a historical perspective, attention must be turned to the popularization of knowledge regarding infectious diseases – specifically through the publication of pamphlets and leaflets, as well as lectures on the transmission routes of illnesses (typhus, cholera, tuberculosis, measles) and the importance of disinfection. Prominent representatives of this movement included Yevhen Ozarkevych (author of the work *Infectious Diseases*) and Yuriy Drohobych in his prognostic publications (Stupak, 2015).

Since the majority of the population resided in rural areas lacking inpatient hospitals and professional physicians, reading rooms transformed into functioning “public health centers”. The primary format utilized by physician-educators in these reading rooms was “loud reading” alongside the distribution of pamphlets. Because literacy rates remained low in many villages, loud reading proved

to be the most effective method: literate community members, teachers, or priests read popular medical pamphlets aloud to the entire community.

For this purpose, works specifically published by NTSh and “Prosvita” were used – such as *Infectious Diseases* by Ye. Ozarkevych, *On Nutrients and Human Vital Force* by I. Horbachevsky, and the periodical *Zdorovlie (Health)* (Havryshchak&Protsiv, 2025; Hanitkevych, 1999). These publications addressed the body’s basic physiological needs, rational nutrition, and personal hygiene, allowing villagers to understand the cause-and-effect relationships between contaminated water, poor hand hygiene, and outbreaks of typhus or cholera.

Another prominent representative of medicine and educational activity was Academician Ivan Horbachevsky – a world-renowned Ukrainian biochemist, hygienist, epidemiologist, public and political figure, and the first Minister of Public Health in Europe (within the government of Austria-Hungary, 1918). His contribution combines fundamental discoveries in global medical science with the development of the healthcare system and higher education for Ukrainians. Beyond his foundational achievements in biochemistry and medicine (the synthesis of uric acid, research on proteins and nucleic acids), as well as his legislative, academic, educational, and philanthropic endeavors, Horbachevsky was distinguished by his active public enlightenment work. He organized and financed Ukrainian student societies (*Akademichna Hromada* in Vienna, *Ukrainska Hromada* in Prague), helped young Ukrainian scholars pursue education in Europe, and promoted a healthy lifestyle among the Ukrainian population by delivering lectures and publications on the importance of sanitation and infectious disease prevention.

Despite being a professor at Charles University in Prague and a world-class scientist, Ivan Horbachevsky managed to translate complex biochemical concepts (metabolism, caloric intake, energy balance) into accessible language for the general reader (Honskyi, 2009). At that time, the reading rooms of *Prosvita* served as the primary hubs of cultural life in villages and small towns. Horbachevsky’s pamphlets were read aloud at community gatherings and discussed in study groups, reaching even illiterate segments of the population. Village teachers, priests, and paramedics utilized his work as a methodological guide to explain to peasants how to properly plan a diet for heavy physical labor, why a monotonous diet (such as relying solely on potatoes or bread) leads to exhaustion and disease, and how nutritional hygiene, immunity, and working capacity are interconnected [Honskyi, 2004]. Thanks to this educational network established by the Shevchenko Scientific Society (NTSh) and *Prosvita*, scientific knowledge about health ceased to be an elite privilege and transformed

into a practical tool for improving the quality of life in Ukrainian communities.

A significant impact was also made by Zenoviy (Zenon) Levytskyi – a Galician physician, sanitary inspector, civic and cultural figure, and healthcare organizer in Pokuttia and Galicia. As a colleague and associate of Yevhen Ozarkevych, he contributed significantly to the development of Ukrainian-language medicine, anti-epidemic protection, and sanitary education. During the Ukrainian-Polish War (1918–1919), Levytskyi served on the Sanitary Inspection of the State Secretariat of Internal Affairs of the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR). In this role, he organized and inspected epidemic hospitals, sanitary commissions, and “mobile sanitary units” across Galicia during outbreaks of typhus and eruptive fevers, while actively promoting hygiene rules among the population to prevent the spread of infection. Concurrently, he took an active part in the work of the Ukrainian Medical Society (ULT) and the *Medychna Hromada*, supporting local branches of *Prosvita*, cooperatives, and anti-alcohol societies (*Vidrodzhennia*). By delivering lectures on the harms of alcohol, the importance of personal hygiene, and disease prevention, Levytskyi fostered the development of a professional community of Ukrainian physicians and the dissemination of scientific knowledge in their native language throughout Pokuttia.

Another outstanding representative of medical enlightenment was Academician Ovkseii Korchak-Chepurkivskyi – a prominent hygienist, epidemiologist, healthcare organizer, Minister of Public Health of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR, 1918–1919), and founder of Ukrainian social hygiene and scientific sanitary statistics. As early as 1906, he became the first in Ukraine to lecture on social hygiene and public medicine at Kyiv University. Studying the progression of infectious diseases (diphtheria, cholera, typhus), Korchak-Chepurkivskyi formulated the law of periodicity in diphtheria epidemics and identified the phenomenon of antagonism between diphtheria and other childhood infections. Later, while working at the Institute of Demography and Sanitary Statistics, he compiled the first detailed mortality and life expectancy tables for the population.

As head of the Sanitary Department and Minister of Public Health of the UNR and the Ukrainian State, Korchak-Chepurkivskyi advocated that the top priority of medicine should be prevention rather than merely treating consequences. For this reason, he dedicated a series of works to researching *Zemstvo* medicine and the hygienic education of peasants, emphasizing the critical need for accessible medical care for the poorest strata (Verkhatskyi&Zabludovsky, 1991). Ovkseii Korchak-Chepurkivskyi laid the scientific foundation

of preventive medicine in Ukraine, transitioned the teaching of hygiene and epidemiology to the native language, and established sanitary education and demographic analysis as key instruments of state public health policy.

Innovator and civic and cultural figure Feliks (Shchasnyi) Selskyi was not only a prominent Ukrainian obstetrician-gynecologist and scholar, but he also entered history as the founder of domestic scientific gynecological literature and one of the pioneers in developing medical instruments in Galicia. The primary orientation of his medical and educational activities was centered around his work within the Shevchenko Scientific Society (NTSh): starting in 1897, Selskyi served as deputy chairman, and from 1898 to 1901, he headed the Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Medical Section. During this period, he initiated the publication of Ukrainian-language scientific medical literature. Together with his colleagues, he stood up in defense of his native language in science, passing a resolution to publish scientific medical works in Ukrainian (Selskyi, 1912). In 1897, he published one of the first professional medical articles in Ukrainian and contributed significantly to the development and implementation of Ukrainian medical terminology.

From his youth, Feliks Selskyi was a close friend of Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Pavliuk, and Ostap Terletskyi, participating in the activities of the first socialist circle in Galicia. He provided financial support for the publication of the journals *Drug* (*Friend*) and *Hromadskyi Drug* (*Public Friend*), where he also published his own publicistic, literary, and critical articles (often under the pseudonym *Shchasnyi*). He facilitated the establishment of the first popular science and professional periodicals – such as *Likarskyi Zbirnyk* (*Medical Collection*), *Zdorovlie* (*Health*), and *Likarskyi Visnyk* (*Medical Bulletin*) – as well as native-language textbooks (including S. Verkhatskyi's textbook on the history of medicine).

Feliks Shchasnyi was actively engaged in rural charity and civic work. Having acquired an estate in the village of Vytvytsia (in the Prykarpattia region), he provided free, qualified medical and obstetric care to local peasant women during difficult childbirths; from 1919 onward, he worked as a district physician in Bolekhiv. In his practice, he taught proper childbirth hygiene and debunked dangerous superstitions (such as feeding infants chewed food wrapped in dirty cloth, known as “zhovanky”).

Reducing maternal and infant mortality was always a benchmark for the success of medical enlightenment. Selskyi actively and consistently advocated for the elimination of harmful folk customs and outdated methods during childbirth and infant care. He organized courses for women that promoted exclusive breastfeeding and the

involvement of visiting nurses. Together with his colleagues – frequently on weekends or during field visits to districts – he conducted public talks in reading rooms featuring visual aids. The topics of his lectures included “Prevention of “Consumption” (Tuberculosis) and Infectious Diseases”, “The Harms of Alcoholism and Smoking”, “Rational Nutrition During Fieldwork”, and “First Aid Awareness for Injuries”. Feliks Shchasnyi earned widespread authority. When advice on clean air, patient isolation, or vaccinations came from educated community members within the respected environment of a reading room, it gradually dispelled the public’s fear of official medicine and vaccines (particularly against smallpox). Through his support, anti-alcohol societies (such as *Vidrodzhennia*) and sanitary circles were formed alongside *Prosvita* reading rooms. Reading room activists initiated the whitewashing of houses, the maintenance of clean wells, and the enforcement of sanitary norms in rural yards.

He frequently repeated that to educate society, a physician must speak in a language the public understands; accordingly, he worked diligently to replace complex Latin, German, or Russian terminology with native professional vocabulary (such as the “Project of Ukrainian Medical Terminology” developed by the Medical Commission of NTSh). The promotion of high moral and ethical principles in medical practice – where mercy, free assistance to the vulnerable, and public service were paramount (as demonstrated at the “Narodna Lichnitsia” free outpatient clinic) – was embodied in the first educational foundations for both university students and public reading rooms. Feliks Shchasnyi also investigated the fates of repressed, silenced, or forgotten fellow scholars to preserve the continuity of Ukrainian medical schools (as later reflected in the works of V. Pliushch, Ya. Hanitkevych, and P. Pundii) (Pliushch, 1970; Hanitkevych & Pundii, 2008).

In the post-war period, he helped revive *Prosvita* branches, rural schools, and civic organizations in Prykarpattia. In recognition of his exceptional professionalism, Feliks Shchasnyi was recommended to the Supreme Health Council of Austria-Hungary in 1913 and was awarded the Order of Franz Joseph. Feliks Selskyi combined the talents of a physician-inventor, an innovative scholar, an educator, and a selfless philanthropist. His efforts rendered domestic gynecology genuinely scientific and accessible to the Ukrainian population. His educational work targeted not only patients but also the formation of the medical community itself [Pundii, 1994]. Thanks to the *Prosvita* reading rooms, medical science ceased to be an abstract theory; instead, it helped transform theory into the daily practical habits of peasants, leading to a substantial reduction in mortality from infections and significantly raising the overall sanitary culture of the Ukrainian countryside.

A prominent representative of Ukrainian medicine in the diaspora was the civic and medical figure, bio-bibliographer, and biographer Dr. Pavlo Pundii. Unlike his innovator predecessors, Pavlo Pundii’s primary contribution lies in the preservation, systematization, and popularization of the history of Ukrainian medical science, as well as documenting the contribution of Ukrainian physicians to global medicine. His main endeavor was the collection, editing, and multi-volume publication (in collaboration with Yaroslav Hanitkevych) of unique biographical data on thousands of Ukrainian doctors and scientists both in Ukraine and abroad. Through his archival work, the names of many Ukrainian medical professionals who had been repressed or silenced by the Soviet regime were restored to scientific discourse. For over half a century, Pavlo Pundii collected and analyzed documents, periodicals, monographs, memoirs, and personal archives of Ukrainian doctors. Based on these compiled materials, he edited and published 14 volumes of the *Ukrainian Medical Archive* series, creating a foundational database for researchers in the history of medicine. Subsequently, he published hundreds of articles, essays, and obituaries in diaspora journals (notably in *Likarskyi Visnyk*), focusing on issues of deontology, the history of healing, and the national-patriotic educational role of the physician. Pavlo Pundii was a long-time active member, archivist, and library director of the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America (UMANA) in the USA, where he organized medical conventions, conferences, and cultural-educational meetings.

An outstanding Ukrainian surgeon, educator, Doctor of Medical Sciences, and medical historian, Professor Serhiy Verkh ratskyi not only performed thousands of complex surgeries and trained an entire school of surgeons, but also founded the teaching of medical history in Ukraine by writing the first Ukrainian-language textbook on the subject. The book went through several editions and served for decades as the primary textbook for students across all medical universities in Ukraine. Many of his works were dedicated to studying the lives and contributions of prominent figures in domestic medicine (including M. Pyrohov, D. Samoylovych, O. Shuplainskyi, and others). Despite his extensive surgical practice and scientific work, Professor Verkh ratskyi actively delivered lectures to practicing physicians, students, and the general public, emphasizing the importance of deontology (medical ethics) and the preservation of medical traditions (Pundii, 1994). He headed the Regional Scientific Society of Surgeons of Prykarpattia and participated in creating museum exhibits dedicated to the development of medicine in the region.

An exceptional Ukrainian phthisiologist, pulmonologist, medical historian, civic-political

figure, and long-time leader of UMANA was Professor Vasyl Pliushch. His activities combined fundamental research on tuberculosis, the development of healthcare in Ukraine, and the systematic study of the history of domestic medicine in emigration. Prior to World War II, Vasyl Pliushch worked in Kyiv, where he became one of the leading specialists in the fight against tuberculosis and authored over 100 scientific works on early diagnosis, prevention, and comprehensive treatment of lung diseases. For many years, he headed the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America, transforming it into a powerful scientific and civic center for the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the USA and Canada. For a long time, he chaired the Medical Commission of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in America and initiated scientific conferences and conventions for Ukrainian doctors of the global diaspora. While living in emigration (Germany, and later the USA), he authored a fundamental two-volume work on the history of Ukrainian medicine – one of the most comprehensive studies on the development of medical practice in Ukraine from ancient times to the mid-20th century (Pliushch, 1970). Vasyl Pliushch served not only as editor-in-chief but also as an active contributor to the diaspora-revived journal *Likarskyi Visnyk*, which covered cutting-edge medical advancements alongside medical ethics, deontology, and patriotic education. Concurrently, he authored numerous sections on medicine and biology in the *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* (edited by V. Kubiiovych). Vasyl Pliushch meticulously documented details regarding Ukrainian doctors and scientists repressed and executed by the Soviet regime, restoring their names to history.

One of the most active popularizers of Ukraine's medical heritage is the distinguished Ukrainian physiologist, toxicologist, medical historian, Doctor of Medical Sciences, and Professor Yaroslav Hanitkevych. Together with Pavlo Pundii, he became a chief chronicler of the Ukrainian medical world, dedicating decades to recovering the forgotten names of Ukrainian doctors and building Ukrainian-language medical education (Hanitkevych&Pundii, 2008). In this collaboration, they compiled and published fundamental biographical reference volumes detailing thousands of Ukrainian physicians who practiced in Ukraine and the diaspora, investigating and shedding light on the fates of hundreds of Ukrainian medical scholars destroyed or silenced by the totalitarian Soviet regime. Yaroslav Hanitkevych advocated for purging Ukrainian medical vocabulary of *surzhyk* and Russisms, emphasizing that language is a fundamental tool for a physician's thinking and education (Hanitkevych, 2004). He was a regular contributor to journals such as the *Journal of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Ukraine*, *Proceedings of the NTSh*, and *Medical World*, where he addressed issues of medical

ethics, deontology, and the patriotic education of youth. Yaroslav Hanitkevych combined rigorous physiological research with the dedicated work of a historian. Thanks to his encyclopedic works, Ukrainian medical science gained its own cohesive history, and the names of its creators were preserved for future generations.

An outstanding Ukrainian humanist scholar of the Renaissance era, Doctor of Philosophy and Medicine, professor and rector of the University of Bologna, and professor at the University of Cracow was Dr. Yurii Drohobych (Heorhii Kotermak). He became the first Ukrainian Doctor of Medicine and the first Ukrainian author of a printed book, making a fundamental contribution to 15th-century European science and education (Isaievych, 1993, p. 19). Having obtained the highest academic degree in medicine at the University of Bologna (Italy) – one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Europe at the time – he served as a private and court physician (personal doctor to the Italian Marquis Ercole I d'Este and King Casimir IV of Poland) and taught pharmacology, anatomy, and medical disciplines at the Universities of Bologna and Cracow, combining traditional medicine with modern clinical observations. At the age of 30, he was elected Rector of Humanities (medicine and arts) at the University of Bologna, where he maintained high standards of medical education. Upon returning to Central-Eastern Europe, Yurii Drohobych taught at the University of Cracow, where the prominent astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus was among his students. In 1483, his work *Prognostic Assessment of the Current Year 1483* (*Iudicium pronosticon anii M.CCCC.LXXXIII*) was published in Rome as the first known printed book by a Ukrainian author (Drohobych, 1992). Alongside astronomical and geographical data, it contained crucial medical sections: forecasts regarding the emergence and spread of epidemic diseases, advice on healthy living, disease prevention, and meteosensitivity, as well as an analysis of climate and weather impacts on human health. Yurii Drohobych integrated Ukrainian intellectual thought into the European scientific space of the Renaissance, combining practical medicine, academic enlightenment, and book printing.

Conclusions. The educational activity of Ukrainian physicians transformed medicine from a private service into a vital factor of public health, national identity, and social security. The utilization of the *Prosvita* reading rooms network, public lectures, "loud readings" and popular science publications allowed basic sanitary and hygienic knowledge to reach the most vulnerable and illiterate segments of the population, significantly reducing epidemic mortality.

Through the works of Ye. Ozarkevych, F. Selskyi, Ya. Hanitkevych, and other figures, Ukrainian medical terminology was created and

systematized, displacing foreign borrowings and establishing the Ukrainian language within high science and education. Furthermore, researching and systematizing the history of domestic healing (the works of P. Pundii, V. Pliushch, and S. Verkh ratskyi) ensured the continuity of medical traditions, restored the memory of repressed scholars, and established high ethical standards for medical practice based on mercy and free assistance.

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Authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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