

## STATE-OF-THE-ART REVIEW

# Current Status and Prospects of Occupational Medicine in the Russian Federation

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### Abstract

An in-depth analysis conducted on the historical background and current status of occupational medicine in Russia is presented. Scientific and practical bases of occupational medicine in the Russian Federation were based on 2 of the most important principles of health service: free medical care and its preventive orientation. Our analysis of the current situation in occupational medicine in modern Russia shows a transition from the vision of zero occupation-related harm to the strategy of recognizing, assessing, and managing occupational exposures. The system of workplace monitoring is developing successfully, with the creation of a federal database for the state of working conditions and the implementation of mechanisms for occupational risk assessment and management. However, at the same time, the system of medical surveillance for workers needs substantial reform. Over the past few years, the professional community of specialists in occupational medicine has taken several steps to improve the quality of its work. Understanding of the need for reforming the system of occupational medicine has continued to grow, which will improve the quality of medical monitoring for workers and extend professional longevity. Current challenges and prospects of occupational medicine in the Russian Federation are discussed.

**KEY WORDS** occupational medicine, occupational hygiene, workers health, health care system

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## INTRODUCTION

The health status of a working population in any country is a reflection of the quality of the health care system as a whole. Thus, the World Health Organization (WHO) considers occupational health to be among the most important indicators of health

status in both developed and developing countries.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of a social formation shift in Russia that began in the mid-1990s, the health care system in the Russian Federation has constantly changed over the past 20 years.

The total population of Russia in 2014 was 146.3 million. Among this population, the number

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of employed individuals reached 71.5 million, involved in the 99 main types of productive and nonproductive activities.<sup>2</sup> In modern conditions, the world experts estimate the overall health of the Russian working population (men 18–60 years, women 18–55 years) to be rather low due to the high mortality rate, significantly higher male mortality level, and a high prevalence of major non-communicable diseases, especially those of the circulatory, respiratory, and digestive systems.<sup>3</sup>

According to official government statistics, 1 of every 3 workers in Russia is exposed to harmful working conditions in which the levels of exposure in the workplace exceed the national hygienic standards.<sup>2,4</sup> However, the level of occupational morbidity in Russia remains extremely low. In 2014, only 8175 cases of occupational disease were reported, representing 5.5 cases per 100,000 in the general population, a rate much less than in many European countries. For comparison, the number of cases of occupational disease per 100,000 in Germany, France, Spain, and Belgium was 78.1, 63.9, 57.1, and 29.3, respectively.

Given the high proportion of workers exposed to hazardous working conditions, the level of occupational morbidity in Russia is probably higher than reported. The low level of occupational morbidity may be due to lack of availability and quality of care. We think that the current situation requires the profound analysis of the medical surveillance system for the working population. That analysis presents the primary goal of our actual work. However, the health care system in the Russian Federation is based on its own peculiarities. Thus, the current status of occupational medicine in Russia remains beyond understanding without those peculiarities being mentioned.

## HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE

The development of occupational medicine in Russia began at the end of the 19th century. Several laws regarding hygienic requirements for child labor were adopted in 1882. The factory inspection had been established in 1882 under the control of the Ministry of Finance to oversee working conditions. Occupational health services in Russia did not exist until 1917. Only a few medical doctors considered the working conditions, the most known was

F.F. Erisman (1842–1915), one of the founders of hygienic science in Russia.<sup>4</sup>

From 1917 to 1991, scientific and practical bases of occupational medicine were gradually developed on the 2 most important principles of health policy in the USSR: free medical care and its preventive orientation. During the first decades of Soviet government in Russia, a set of laws and regulations on occupational health and safety (OHS) was formed, which included classification of work according to severity and danger, a system of mandatory medical examinations, mandatory registration of occupational diseases, the Labor Code, and the legislation for victims of occupational accidents.

Mandatory medical examinations of industrial workers in Soviet Russia were not originally focused on the identification of occupational diseases. They were initiated primarily to reduce the high level of morbidity and mortality caused by the most common infectious and noninfectious diseases. Later, with the development of occupational medicine, a system of mandatory medical examinations was implemented, based on the existing occupational risks. The mandatory medical examination system was repeatedly revised (in 1949, 1957, 1969, 1984, 1989) keeping the main components unchanged:

1. The state covered the cost of medical examinations.
2. Medical examinations were performed not only by one occupational physician but by a number of doctors of various specialties.
3. Compulsory transfer of an employee to another job in the case of medical contraindications resulted from the examination.

The first Russian list of 21 occupational diseases was ratified by the Ministry of Health in 1928. Furthermore, the list was supplemented and revised in 1931, 1970, and 1989, but was always based on a “closed system” with many limitations.

The basic legal and regulatory framework in the field of OHS in Russia was approved in the 1930s and was updated only at a later time. That was the beginning of the formation of hygienic regulation in Russia. The State Sanitary Service was established and entailed a control of the state sanitary over the industrial enterprises. At the same time, the system of higher medical education was formed, simultaneously with the development of occupational medicine as an academic discipline resulting in the establishment of the Moscow Institute of Hygiene and Occupational Diseases in 1923. Similar institutions were funded in other cities: Kharkov

<sup>4</sup>Federal State Statistics Service of Russian Federation ([http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/wages/](http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/wages/))

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