

“You must not rely upon the words that very kind and beautiful girls utter, because in that regard, no offence, they all – lie”: Venereal Diseases as a Motive of Fran Gundrum’s (1856-1919) Work on Sexual Hygiene

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SUMMARY Until the works of Fran Gundrum, there was no comprehensive analysis of sexuality in Croatia. In this article, we investigate the background of Gundrum’s book *Sexual Health Care*, the first book on sexual hygiene in Croatia. We analyzed the motivational effect venereal diseases had on writing the book, as well as the metaphoric language he used to conceptualize them. Venereal diseases are presented in his work as a consequence of irresponsible sexual behavior, and are interpreted using the analogy of natural state of English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes. All aspects of his suggestions for suppression of venereal diseases were colored by giving priority to social over individual well-being. Tradition and modernity intermix in his work, shaping him as the pioneer of sexual hygiene on our territory in the times when questions about heredity and survival of the nation started to forcefully shape public health policies.

KEY WORDS: Fran Gundrum, venereal diseases, sexual hygiene, sexual behavior, history of medicine, Croatia

Until Fran Gundrum (1856-1919), not much had been written on the subject of sexuality in Croatia. Some of the Latin medieval texts found under the common title *Regimen*, which were shaped by theory and practice of Salerno’s practitioners, contain discussions on human sexuality (1,2). However, medical concepts were only one aspect of their contents, and not necessarily the most important one (3). This situation did not change much until the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

The turning point in the research of sexuality in Croatia is the book *Sexual Health Care* (4) (Fig. 1) written by Fran Gundrum, a physician from Oriovac (Fig. 2). The first edition of this work appeared in 1905, and the second in 1914, and it represents a pioneering work, which introduced many advancements in treating this subject both regarding the form and the contents.

With this article, we will try to illuminate the background of Gundrum’s work on sexuality, as well as his



Figure 1. The cover of Gundrum's book Sexual Health Care, 2nd edition.

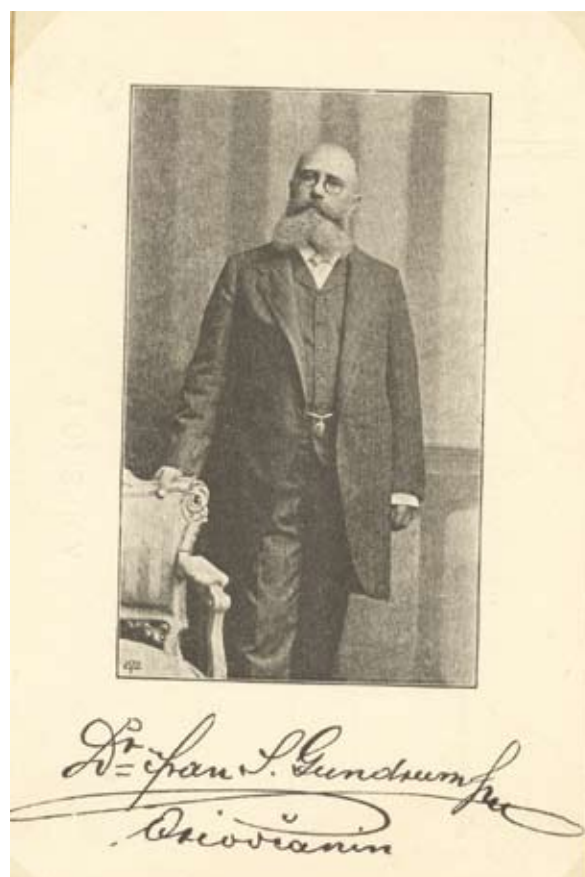


Figure 2. Fran Gundrum.

key ideas. We will analyze the metaphoric language he used to conceptualize venereal diseases. Additionally, we will investigate the notions of duty and guilt, with which he emphasized the superiority of social category in health policy.

The article is based on the analysis of the second edition of Sexual Health Care, but also on his published articles and the unpublished material.

SEXUAL HEALTH CARE

Fran Gundrum was born in a small town of Oriovac, in a well-situated family. After high school, he wanted to become a pharmacist, but his father urged him to become a priest. Although he spent a lot of time in church, he felt that this vocation would not satisfy him, so he decided to study medicine. Since at that time Medical School in Zagreb did not exist, he initially planned to study in Prague, but when he came to Vienna he changed his mind and stayed there (5). By the time Gundrum enrolled in 1875, the Vienna Medical School had already acquired a reputation for

excellence. The most famous representatives of the Second Vienna School put the emphasis on specialization and transformed the Austrian capital into the best-known medical center in the world. A major part of the fame can be attributed to the remarkable Department of Dermatology and Ferdinand Hebra (1816-1880) who headed it up. By the end of Gundrum's studies in the 1880s, Hebra was already dead, and Carl Sigmund retired from his position as head of the great syphilis clinic. The center stage at the Vienna dermatology of the last two decades of 19th century was dominated by Moritz Kaposi (1837-1902). He worked at several departments of the Vienna General (University) Hospital, became assistant professor with a treatise on syphilis and eventually joined Hebra's department in 1866, where he served as his assistant. After terms of associate professor, he took over the chair in 1881 following Hebra's death and remained at this position until his death. Both of them served as international role models for clinical scientists (6). After obtaining a diploma (Fig. 3), Gundrum returned



Figure 3. Gundrum's diploma from Vienna Medical School, 1882.

to Croatia and started working as a city physician in Brod na Savi (1882-1889), then in Bulgaria (1889-1894), and finally in Križevci (1894-1919). He worked mostly on promoting healthy lifestyle, the fact that led historians of medicine to portray him as an advocate of health enlightenment (5,7,8).

Sexual Health Care consists of 38 chapters grouped into four broadly defined units: anatomy and (patho)physiology of sex organs, sexual intercourse and sexual disorders, psychosocial phenomenon of prostitution, and venereal diseases. Gundrum explained that if he succeeded in his attempt to inform the public about the dangers of sexual diseases, the people would "surely have comprehended the seriousness of disease, and seek for help immediately" (4).

Gundrum described the three most important venereal diseases: gonorrhea, soft chancre, and syphilis. Of those, Gundrum considered gonorrhea most important in terms of well-being of the nation (4). Using its example, he presented his thoughts on two factors most important in the development of venereal diseases: the "mechanical touch" and the contagion. Gundrum used detailed description of clinical fea-

tures of gonorrhea, coupled with a realistic depiction of patient's misery, as a proof of the seriousness of the disease too often neglected: "(...) many cases are not treated at all or are treated superficially because it is considered a benign illness" (4). Additionally, he warned against the possible mental disorders arising from epididymitis, a common complication, not only because the infertile men will "suffer and lose the impetus for creative, or any serious work whatsoever", but also because they will develop "neuralgia of the testicular nerves, or of the nerves of the epididymis and the deferent duct" (4).

Gundrum's account of the patient suffering from soft chancre is most distinct: "Whoever gets it is not clean, and whoever spreads it further, is indeed completely filthy, physically and mentally filthy. To spread this disease means: not caring for hygiene" (4). Water, soap and a dilution of sublimate are the recommended measures (4).

Gundrum devoted many pages to syphilis, since it represents a paradigmatic venereal disease. He believed that syphilis was an old disease, the oldest reports coming from the 3rd millennium BC in China. It was very important for him to establish the notion of a long history of syphilis because he wanted to ascribe various negative historical events to promiscuity. He wrote, for example, "a great part of the Charles' VIII army at the gate of Naples was destroyed by syphilis" (4). Due to its capability to ruin the otherwise healthiest and most progressive part of the society, Gundrum called syphilis "a terrible scourge of mankind" (4). There is a special paragraph devoted to the problem of syphilis in marriage, in which he recommended that physicians do not sign permission for marriage until after 5 or 6 years have passed since the symptoms faded (4). During World War I, Gundrum published a paper in which he mentioned Salvarsan for the first time in treating syphilis (9).

THE SUPPRESSION OF VENEREAL DISEASES

According to Gundrum, there are two groups of methods that can be used as a safeguard against venereal diseases. One is to prevent direct contact with a sick person, and the other is the hygiene of the genitals. Apart from these, Gundrum only passingly mentioned the third method – banishing those who are sick – since he considered that method "completely impossible" (4). Gundrum used the term banishment repeatedly when dealing with another topic, the problem of criminality (10,11). Given his enthusiasm about sterilization and deportation of criminals, the only reason preventing him to adopt such methods for those suffering from venereal diseases was not

ethical, but technical. To carry out such comprehensive interventions was extremely difficult, financially and otherwise. Hence, Gundrum was against banishing those having venereal diseases, not because he felt that would be at odds with personal freedoms, but probably because he thought it would be more of a burden to the society than venereal diseases themselves.

Methods of preventing venereal diseases can be undertaken at individual or at a global level (4). Gundrum considered education to be of utmost importance in fighting venereal diseases. Also, he called for the general availability of cheap products such as condoms. In his teaching, every man must become aware that in preventing venereal diseases he is all by himself, and "must not in any way rely upon the convincing words that very kind and beautiful girls sometimes utter because in that regard, no offence, they all – lie" (4). He recommended that within 6 hours of unprotected sex, men wash their genitals with gasoline and apply 2-3 drops of 20% protargol dilution to the external urethral meatus, while women must wash the vagina with 1-2 liters of 1% dilution of lysoform or 2% dilution of carbol, using irrigator (4).

MEDICAL POLICE

Although Gundrum anticipated the importance of the principle of health care availability, he nevertheless relied mostly upon medical police. One of the possible means he proposed to combat high morbidity and mortality of venereal diseases was the request that physicians report to the health committee, by personal name, those suffering from a venereal disease. After that, the committee could do with the patient whatever it takes to "protect the society, the community", and seek those from whom the patient acquired the disease (4). At that time, the Act on Health Care and Provisions Concerning Medical Practice for the territory of Croatia and Slavonia declared mandatory treatment and reporting "in women, professionally leading promiscuous life, and in all people for whom there is a reasonable doubt that under their peculiar relationships venereal diseases could spread" (12). Gundrum described this reporting as "undoubtedly a good thing" (4), and maintained that those medically supervised must be treated – voluntarily or involuntarily (9).

Gundrum also suggested medical supervision of soldiers when the Great War ends. He pointed out that such supervision is in the interest of the state, and only passingly mentioned the interests of the individuals: "(...) in main part the interests of general well-being and the state demand a necessary and in-

evitable control and treatment of such persons" (9). It would be wrong, Gundrum argued, to "suppress [venereal diseases] using only medical methods" (9). Accordingly, he recommended establishing special institution for safeguarding public health, with a division specifically dealing with venereal diseases. The workings of that institution "must not appear as that of a penal procedure, but as a medical act of caution having medical purpose" (9). Nevertheless, Gundrum wanted that division to have the authority to supervise those under health control as well as those who are not, and the power to "persuade, warn, reprimand, and take (from the streets)" people with suspicious sexual behavior (9). With a maneuver of broadening the definition of prostitute to "every woman, who is only easy going, or who due to the strong feelings and passions gives herself to a salacious life out of fun, or who has an intercourse with someone" (9), Gundrum wanted to give the state a substantial control over ordinary people. Additionally, for those prostitutes who appear to be "incorrigible", Gundrum suggested the establishment of colonies to which they would be permanently taken (9).

In order to boost his arguments, Gundrum used statistics that showed a correlation between the rising number of venereal diseases and lenient police measures (4). He also discussed the jurisdictions of the institutions of police, medicine and the judicial system in the process of prevention. He hoped to achieve that physicians only get to do the work they are most skilled to do – treating patients. However, in terms of developing health policy, Gundrum wanted physicians to have more input, since they are the only ones who "see the misery and distress born out of recklessness on a daily basis" (4).

HOMO HOMINI LUPUS: A METAPHOR IN GUNDRUM'S WORK

In his book *Metaphors We Live By*, contemporary philosopher George Lakoff pointed out that there is a broader role metaphors play in conceptualizing reality, and that our everyday language and thoughts are metaphorical (13). For example, our everyday speech about disease reflects the fact that we conceptualize it as an enemy. We find such a concept in Gundrum's work too; in the Foreword to *Sexual Health Care*, we learn that "venereal diseases are, together with alcoholism and tuberculosis, a stinging scourge that whips our people (...)" (4). The overall picture Gundrum used to present his view on the need to protect oneself against possible contagion is strikingly similar to that which Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), English political philosopher, used in *Leviathan* to describe

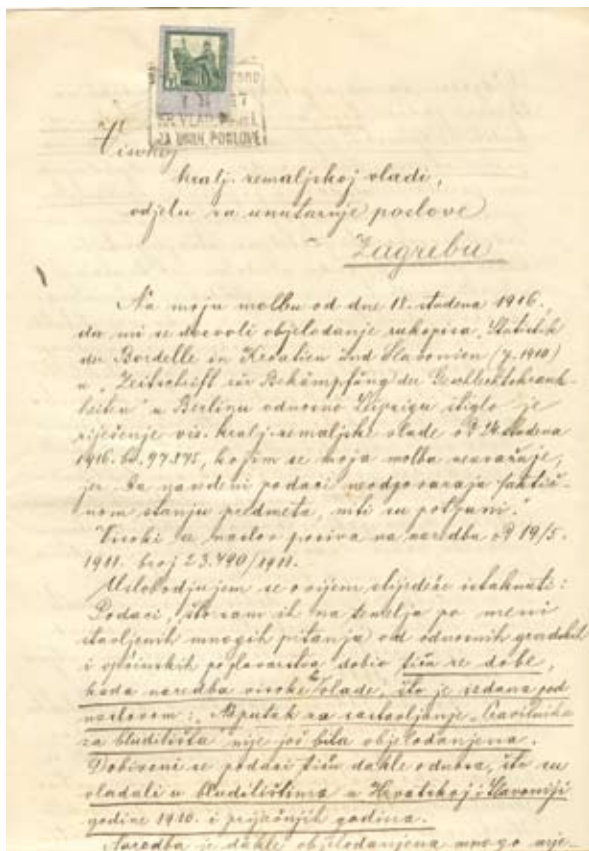


Figure 4. Gundrum's request to the government to allow him to publish a paper on prostitution, 1917.

the state of nature. In natural state, a state without positive laws, people are fighting a perpetual war amongst themselves, and every human has a right to everything. Since this involves constant fear of death, people renounce it and sign a social contract by which they transfer some of their rights, including the right to punish, to the state. Gundrum used this notion as an analogy to the problem of venereal diseases: "Personal suppression [of venereal diseases] is an auto-protection of the state of nature, when everyone takes care of himself, when everyone is an enemy to all others, i.e. everyone's enemy" (4). Gundrum argued that it is for the best to assume that any potential partner is a carrier of disease, which automatically makes them potential enemies, and wanted to make sure that the state gets whatever authority it takes to suppress venereal diseases. What is especially striking in Gundrum's metaphoric language is that he did not only conceive of a disease as an enemy, but also of people having a disease as enemies – enemies to other individuals and the state.

MORALITY AND SEXUALITY

At the very beginning of Sexual Health Care, Gundrum wrote that the sex life of a man is almost as important as the life itself (4). He even thought that the will is molded in adolescence under the influence of "the nerve fibers connecting the genitals to the brain" (4). Until 24 years of age for men and 20 for women, Gundrum recommended complete abstinence from any sexual activity. Otherwise, irreversible harmful effects on the psyche or sexual potency are likely. Gundrum argued that with every "sexual intercourse the whole body is strained (...) taking from the body that which has been overly spent with genitals", a fact that will "absolutely have an adverse effect on the whole nervous system" (4). This made sexual hygiene extremely important, since higher ideals are possible only when the sexual drive is under control. With first sexual intercourse, Gundrum thought, "many ideals perish and the age of altruism succumbs to expanded egoism" (4). Nevertheless, Gundrum thought that healthy morality should also involve natural selfishness (4). Harmonious coexistence of altruism and egoism is therefore a goal of correct moral development. This biological concept of morality translates into fact that it now falls into a domain of science, not ethics (14). Out of such corporal source of morality arises a duty of responsible behavior of individual towards his/her own body and the others.

DUTY AND GUILT

Throughout his works, Gundrum often used a tactic to impute guilt to those who have precipitated the spread of venereal diseases or have behaved irresponsibly. Gundrum wrote that often the patients make a mistake, a "failure to follow the simplest of recommendations" (4). Likewise, he felt that patients suffering from "tuberculosis, pneumonia and rheumatism have only themselves to blame" (4). He also used an uncredited quote from the Notice regarding venereal diseases from 1905 (15), arguing that those who "do not listen to the commands of their conscience", namely, those who do not tell their partners that they are sick, are guilty of committing "the crime of severe bodily injury, i.e. an assault on the safety of life" (4). He also warned against the possible marital inconveniences arising from the disease: "(...) after the ailments of various parts of female genitals they will acquire severe mental diseases of neurasthenic or hysterical character, making marital life with these poor women extremely inconvenient" (4).

The term duty in Gundrum's work has at least two distinct meanings: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal duty, we have seen, consists of being sincere towards

one's sexual partner, and of special responsibility women have towards men in marriage. Vertical duty is basically a duty parents have towards their children and the future of mankind. Besides pointing out that many disease-inducing factors cross placental barrier, Gundrum also allowed transmission of causative agents by semen or egg (4). Therefore, Gundrum warned potential parents: "Who will carry the burden of danger to become sick for the whole life and to pour misery on their progeny?" (4). Not only will the microbes do their part, but also the body weakened by the reckless sexual behavior will produce "weak seed in small numbers, the sperm will become smaller and softer and it will not be strong enough for good fertilization, causing the ruin of the offspring" (4). Considering the fact that altruism and the will are important for responsible sexual behavior throughout life, any immoderation in the adolescent age is an expression of irresponsibility towards oneself and the others. Wrong choices of youth create an overly selfish structure of character, which can indirectly bring ill fortune to partners, children and mankind in general. Gundrum thought that the purpose the nature intended for man "is to marry, have a healthy wife and give birth to healthy children" (4). All the measures of preventing venereal diseases therefore come down to one goal – to maintain healthy mankind.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Gundrum was certainly a progressive researcher and a pioneer in Croatia. His breakthrough in the area extremely under-researched prior to his work was never easy – requests he sent to the government to allow him to publish his articles in international journals have repeatedly been rejected. The explanation was that due to the change in the way the information should be collected, which was enforced in 1911, the data on the history of brothels prior to that year did not represent reality well (16). He pleaded to the Department of Internal Affairs once more in 1917 (17) (Fig. 4), but the paper was never published

On the other hand, Gundrum was deeply rooted in tradition. A detailed research of venereal diseases and their consequences was driven by a goal of protecting the basic unit of society – family. His views on the need for a healthier, stronger population intermix with his conservatism: "The suppression [of venereal diseases] does not serve as much of a purpose of protecting men from disease, as that of allowing the establishment of family" (4). Family alone represented a healthy environment for the child to grow and receive strong ethical education. Gundrum's emphasis on keeping virginity until marriage, moderation in sexual activity, and condemnation of any form of

sexual activity other than heterosexual intra-marital intercourse reflect a conservative side of Gundrum's, which was probably an attempt to reconceptualize certain Christian values he espoused.

Gundrum followed contemporary discussions on heredity, and that made him painfully aware of the limitations of health enlightenment and education. Although he was intellectually still an adherent of the naïve progressivism of the 19th century, these new scientific advancements introduced a certain kind of pessimism in his work regarding biological determinism and the inevitability of irreversible consequences of reckless behavior. Gundrum, therefore, is a typical representative of a time in which problems of heredity and survival of the nation forcefully penetrated the area of health policy.

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