

Sestre milosrdnice



University Hospital

HISTORICAL REVIEW

Women physicians were addressed in this section in 2003, on the 100th anniversary of the Permission for Performing Physician Practice to Women General Medical Practitioners in Croatia, enacted by special Vice-Roy Decree as of June 28, 1903. Now, 110 years later, a sentence closing the Decree sounds likably and interestingly indeed: "... the decree above comes into virtue as *per* this day"¹. Three years before, in 1900, the Austro-Hungarian state decided to allow women to enroll in medical schools in Vienna and Graz². The reactions to this decision by the then Croatian physicians and other intellectuals were serious and quite astonishing, however, everything is changing, and some twenty years later, respectable Croatian politicians Stjepan Radić and Milan Rojc welcomed enrolment of women in medical school³. All this has been discussed in this section and in some other contributions, including notes on the first women physicians in our Hospital⁴⁻⁶. However, on the 110th anniversary, we cannot help repeating some facts, believing that this topic deserves being spoken of over and over. It is certainly interesting as a social phenomenon, revealing that modifying social customs and opinions is a long lasting and difficult process, in face of the reality and history offering the name of the first woman physician (Peseshet) from ancient Egypt 2500 BC through a number of women physicians from ancient times and Middle Ages to great efforts in the 19th century for the women's rights to enroll in medical schools and to perform independent medical practice. The 20th century brought favorable outcome of this issue, when the rights to enroll in medical studies and to medical practice have been equalized, referring not only to medical practice but also to medical science and medical education. During this period of medical history, our Hospital was, to put it figuratively, in the very frontline of the "women in medicine" process; we were the first hospital with two women physicians at

pediatric department, Milana Gavrančić and Katinka Jakšić as early as 1915⁵. After World War I, two women physicians came to the Hospital in 1925: Darinka Čepulić-Bičan, who belonged to the first generation of medical students in Zagreb, and Olga Bošnjaković-Gosztl. When Dr. Ljudevit Kobali, the then head of Pediatric Department, died in 1938, his successor was Dr. Darinka Čepulić-Bičan as interim head, and from 1940 as head of Pediatric Department and the first woman head of department at our Hospital.

At another department of our Hospital, having graduated from the School of Medicine in Vienna, Dr. Jelka Spevec-Gutschy received residency in ophthalmology at Department of Ophthalmology in 1927. She was the first woman ophthalmologist⁶, appointed Head Doctor in 1937, and, as said by her colleagues, she was especially interested in the operative part of the profession and in collaboration with Professor Ante Šercer, ENT specialist, she introduced the method of lacrimal duct reconstruction, dacryocystorhinostomy.

Since that time, and especially after World War II, the number of women physicians at Hospital departments increased, as well as their participation in research and education at School of Medicine, School of Dental Medicine and other related studies. Many of those investigating this phenomenon state that, in spite of all efforts and improvements, equal footing has not yet been achieved for women in medical profession, supporting it by statistical data, various analyses and research; however, they all agree that it will certainly be achieved in this century. In the meantime, our Hospital makes steps forward and some time before this anniversary, in 2012, we elected Professor Vesna Šerić, MD, PhD, as the first woman physician, head of the Hospital, on the 166th anniversary of the Hospital.

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References

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