

Title: Becoming the Doctor: Public and Personal in Nikolai Pirogov's "Questions of Life: Diary of an Old Physician" and Vikenty Veresaev's "The Memoirs of a Physician"

Author: Natalia Vygovskaia, Brown University

Abstract:

The paper is dedicated to juxtaposing a diary of prominent Russian scientist and surgeon, Nikolay Pirogov, and Vikenty Veresaev's "The Memoirs of a Physician," whose non-fiction piece at the turn of the twentieth century gained much attention in the Russian high society, including the Emperor, Nikolai II. This juxtaposition aims to represent two medical narratives as a continuous dialogue, having created a discussion space, where their authors seek to address the same ethical issues, express criticisms about medical education, analyze the controversies of progress, reflect on the nature of organic matter, and respond to the contemporary events. Apart from direct mentioning Pirogov's diary, Veresaev raises similar questions and develops some of Pirogov's themes, such as the moral imagination, depicting scientific breakthrough and its cost, the illiteracy of the Russian peasantry and their hostility to physicians, the doctor's capacity for compassion and tolerance, the pejorative attitude to medicine in the Russian privileged social stratum and the position of women in medicine. While Pirogov wrote his notes at the end of life and did not intend to publish them; Veresaev was relatively young (33), had an ambition to strengthen his recognition as a writer and wanted to target the educated circle. His notes, echoing Pirogov's title, is an early example of medical journalism, where the author tends to reach the broadest audience.

These two medical narratives pose questions, widely debated and discussed today. Although both pieces are translated into English and have become objects of scholarly interest, they have been insufficiently studied and have not been previously inspected together in the context of global medical humanities.