

Dr Lev Ivanovich Medved, the first Minister of Health of the Ukrainian SSR

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*Memories of outstanding people...
give rise to a spirit of reflection from time to time.
They arise as a legacy of all generations...*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Reforms in Ukraine's healthcare system based on the long-term priority of public needs in high-quality medicine as an important element of present-day social initiatives make us to analyse the past experience and developments. Of special interest here is the outstanding personality of the first Minister of Health of the Ukrainian SSR, a diplomat, a prominent scientist and a brilliant public figure, and a member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR — Dr Lev Ivanovich Medved. Let us present the traits of his character and his fruitful work for the government and the public.

“Sun! You will never stop me!” These poetic words were written by Dr Lev I. Medved in his notebook on board of the aircraft flying back to Ukraine from the USA where Dr Medved completed an important government mission. It was Dr Lev I. Medved who signed the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) on behalf of Ukraine. Since 1948, Ukraine has actively cooperated as a member of this global humanitarian community. But what is the meaning of these words left in the notebook? Those words proved his self-motivation and commitment, his deeds on the palette of life. What was that palette? Dr Lev I. Medved was a son of a peasant, a member of Russo-Japanese War who was given a small piece of land in his native village Chernaya Greblia, Vinnitsa region, for his feat of arms. The political views and social beliefs of a young boy, Levko, had matured by revolutionary transformations. As a boy, he sympathised proletarian views. He continued his studies and labour and became one of the first Komsomol leaders in his home area, he shared the ideas of Leninism, especially those based on democratic principles. Naturally, Levko's passion for studies made him one of first students of the Chemical & Pharmaceutical

Institute founded in 1920s in Vinnitsa. (His first name Leontiy found in first official documents was subsequently changed into Lev). Notably, that was one of first Soviet higher educational institutions in Ukraine with very good teaching, scientific and laboratory level. It was there where Dr Lev I. Medved and his life partner, future assistant professor and pharmacologist Sofia G. Serebrianaya felt their inclination for science. At the same time, public leader's traits started to dominate in his character and charismatic nature. He headed pharmacy management service in Vinnitsa and, at the same time, gave lectures in pharmaceuticals in his *alma mater*; he held leading positions and led regional Party office and administrative work. Notably, it was Dr Lev I. Medved who dedicated many efforts to establishing Vinnitsa Medical Institute, today's one of the leading medical universities in Ukraine.

His traits as a leader able to cope with very challenging initiatives nominate him as a candidate for a new position: in early 1930s he led the Dnieper Water Transport Healthcare Department. It was a healthcare and social service which innovations helped thousands of people working for the main waterway of the Republic. The next promotion was not slow to arrive: Dr Lev I. Medved was appointed to head Kiev Regional Healthcare Department and then became Deputy People's Healthcare Commissar of the Ukrainian SSR. Dr Lev I. Medved did his best in both capacities. It was him who organized first kolkhoz maternity homes throughout the region which was much larger than today's Kiev region. As important medical facility, these maternity homes could mitigate the consequences of famine/genocide to some extent. Dr Lev I. Medved continued his hard management efforts and entered Kiev Medical Institute

where he was awarded a doctor's degree in late 1930s. There was a dramatic turn in his professional path and career; however Mikhail Bulgakov said: "...whatever happens will turn out to be as it should be and to be for the better in the end" ("The White Guard"). Dr Lev I. Medved was accused at one of Party meetings as a person aiding and abetting enemies of the people after the same accusation brought against Dr S. I. Kantorovich who had been already arrested. But Medved's witty and brave reply to such aspersion saved him from persecution and imprisonment common for that time. Nevertheless, he was suspended from his work at the People's Healthcare Committee. So, partly by force of circumstances, partly by his passion for research, Dr Lev I. Medved threaded the path of science. He started working as a graduate student for the Institute of Occupational Health and Occupational Diseases where he focused on toxicological and hygienic research of agricultural chemical pesticides, the first elements of "green" revolution. While working on these important studies, Dr Lev I. Medved formed his views as an advocate of preventive toxicology, a new direction in the science of hygiene. Although he had written his Ph. D. thesis, he could defend it only in 1944 thanks to his supervisor Prof Grigoriy Shkavera who saved the text of his thesis.

In early 1941, Dr Lev I. Medved was appointed to lead Kiev Medical Institute (KMI). The oldest Ukraine's educational institution was going to celebrate its 100th anniversary, and Dr Lev I. Medved focused all his efforts on the celebration programme in pre-war May. However, the 100th anniversary of the Institute was celebrated more than three years later in 1944 thanks to truly heroic efforts and deeds of its leader. These peaceful plans were broken off by the war and menacing war days offered an absolutely new titanic role to Dr Lev I. Medved, to his heart and mind — he was to save this higher medical educational institution.

Dr I. M. Trachtenberg, Academician of the National Academy of Medical Sciences of Ukraine and Associate Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, a direct participant of this epic and one of closest followers of Academician Dr Lev I. Medved, a brilliant scientist and a future historian of the Institute, described

those days in every detail. So, let us add a few touches to the whole picture. Many KMI staff members immediately joined medical units of the Armed Forces. Hundreds of students built defence near Irpen, Kiev region, day and night. However the strategic situation changed for the worse, and the government decided to evacuate KMI. Led by Dr Lev I. Medved, KMI was evacuated virtually on foot to Kharkov and then to Ural, Chelyabinsk. Dr Lev I. Medved could keep smooth operation of the Institute at all stages of its survival and functioning and could train ever-growing number of doctors for the Armed Forces based on high scientific, ethic and efficient standards of performance.

In 1943, once Kiev was liberated from Nazi, Kiev Medical Institute resumed its operation in its home city under the leadership of Dr Lev I. Medved. The training and education process functioned again; chairs and clinics resumed their operation. An anniversary meeting was held in autumn 1944 at Kiev Opera House. It was chaired by Dr Lev I. Medved and attended by the members of UkrSSR Government and prominent healthcare professional Dr Nikolay Aleksandrovich Semashko. Many KMI staff members, including its Director, were solemnly rewarded by the government for their work.

KMI, today's National A. A. Bogomolets Medical University, was like the apple of the eye for Dr Lev I. Medved. In post-war decades, he headed the Chair of Occupational Health of the Institute which brought many outstanding Ukrainian hygienists and toxicologists.

The life however brought new tasks and challenges before him and his unique skills and political excellence. In 1945, Dr Lev I. Medved was appointed to the People's Healthcare Committee of the Ukrainian SSR as a first deputy. As a part of our government delegation, he joined UNRRA¹, attended the first session of the United Nations General Assembly, and the first International Healthcare Conference. This important mission deserves more attention. Thanks to his political talent, Ukraine received substantial aid from UNRRA, an administrative body established after the victory as a United Nations agency to provide aid in post-war rehabilitation.

¹ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

Dr Lev I. Medved attended subsequent landmark sessions of UNRRA (III, IV and V) in the United States, United Kingdom and Switzerland. At the first session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Ukrainian doctor and diplomat was an advisor for the U. N. Environment and Social Council and represented the Ukrainian SSR in this authoritative international agency. In this respect, a historic photo seems to be very symbolic: Dr Lev I. Medved is disputing with V. M. Molotov and A. A. Gromyko.

In 1946, Dr Lev I. Medved represented the Ukrainian SSR at the International Healthcare Conference where WHO was founded. He was actively involved in the work of the WHO Constitution Subcommittee and signed the Constitution on behalf of the Ukrainian SSR.

Dr Medved's personal files have many interesting facts continued to be important today, e. g. his impressions of the United States: "There are on-site laboratories. Applied sciences are well-developed everywhere" (a note dated April 11, 1946). Of interest is another note dated May 12, 1946: "Upon an invitation by the Ukraine Aid Committee, I spoke at the meeting of forward-looking Americans of Ukrainian origin, 250–300 people in total. They escaped from tsesarsky regime in Western Ukraine. They are miserable scouts of Fortune. They listened attentively. When I told about fascist atrocities, some were crying".

During the period of restoration of healthcare institutions and sanitary and epidemiological services in Ukraine, Dr Lev Medved, Deputy People's Commissar, demonstrated his brilliant organizational skills. By involving the public, he could quickly restore the healthcare facilities in rural areas of Zhitomir region. His initiative was approved by the republican government and was replicated in Kiev region, Kharkov region, Chernigov region, Poltava region and many other areas of Ukraine. More than 2,000 healthcare institutions, including more than a thousand in rural areas, were put into operation by autumn 1945.

His initiatives and excellence, his strong inter-personal skills were highly respected and he was appointed as a Minister of Health in March 1947. No one in Ukraine had ever had such a high official status in the healthcare system in the Ukrainian SSR. So, Dr Lev I. Medved was the first Minister

of Health of Ukraine (his predecessors had the status of People's Commissars). There were many things to do: the network and the system of healthcare institutions required total restoration and extension and highly skilled staff. There were many sensitive issues. For example, 200 districts had no surgeons. Due to droughts and poor harvests, migration increased and the incidence rates of contagious diseases raised. The capacity of infectious departments and hospital should have been extended in a short while.

The urgency of such challenges seemed to strike the minister. But he could find a solution to influence the situation in general. Dr Lev I. Medved believed that potent and mobile sanitary organization could be an adequate solution. There were 1,200 health inspectors; functions and authority of the state health inspection were extended. Health inspection services were supported by vehicles and laboratory facilities. A network of disinfection chambers was introduced and Donbass companies started to UV-radiation therapy rooms and new air ventilation facilities. Preventive measures took the offensive.

In 1947, a new reform was started in the healthcare system to unite hospitals and polyclinics. The idea was to take advantage of real opportunities, to find pluses and to mitigate minuses. The Minister believed that tactical initiative of experienced healthcare professionals able to demonstrate advantages of new initiatives through their personal example would be more efficient than applying a formal approach to implementation of the Union guidance.

One of such innovators was Dr N. F. Gorbachevsky, a surgeon and a chief physician of Zhitomir Regional Hospital, future Hero of Socialist Labour. Dr N. A. Lengauer, Chief Physician of Kiev Emergency, could also ensure smooth operation of the first-aid service and was subsequently granted this title of honour. However, more than 400 top management positions at district healthcare departments remained vacant. So, the Postgraduate Medical Institute started to train such specialists at the suggestion of Dr Lev I. Medved to fill the gap. He spoke before healthcare professionals almost every week and peered into their eyes trying to predict their potential.

In 1948, Kiev hosted the 7th Republican Congress of Hygienists, Epidemiologists,

Microbiologists and Infectious Disease Specialists. It was one of the first comprehensive forums in the post-war decades. Minister Lev I. Medved approved the proposed Programme for Improved Preventive Medicine. Sanitary consequences of the war were almost overcome by the end of that year. The Republic had approximately 35,000 doctors, 3,811 polyclinic and outpatient facilities, 9,469 first-aid/obstetric units, 948 health inspection stations. There were 2,480 day nurseries, 1,283 paediatric and maternity welfare centres, and 746 infant food production facilities. The fight against epidemiological goitre continued and universal salt iodization programmes were launched. The capacity of medical science was enhanced. The Minister supported many scientists in their research and sector reforms — Drs N. D. Strazhesko, A. I. Arutyunov, I. N. Ischenko, A. A. Chayka, E. N. Khokhol, V. P. Filatov, to name a few of them. The remarkable fact is Dr Lev I. Medved's article following conferment of the rank of the Hero of Socialist Labour to Academician V. P. Filatov. Dr Lev I. Medved said: "He is a man of versatile interests; he loves literature, writes poetry, and paints pictures. In Dr Filatov's office, there is a large map with many flags showing institutions where tissue therapy is now applied. Here are numbers of keratoplastic operations".

Dr Lev I. Medved was the Minister of Health of the Ukrainian SSR through 1952. Among all the top officials of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, he was one of the most efficient, brave and reputable ministers. In the Soviet period, a popular song had such words: "Everyone becomes a hero if the country says to be". It is an embellishment and abstraction, but Dr Lev I. Medved was such a hero in his life and deeds and, if you like, a knight without fear and reproach.

He was forty-six when he started his new job — Director of the Institute of

Occupational Health and Occupational Diseases and he had a lot to do for the next three decades of his earthy life. Of special importance are his initiatives in 1960 s. Dr Lev I. Medved came up with an idea and was actively involved in establishing the research institute of preventive medicine, an institution of a new level — All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Hygiene and Toxicology of Pesticides, Polymers and Plastics of the Ministry of Health of the USSR. He was appointed to head this Institute opened in 1967 and worked as its Director until 1982. He founded the Chair of Hygiene of Pesticides and Clinical Findings of Chemical Poisoning within the system of medical education. He was elected as an academician of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR. He developed the first hygienic classification of pesticides in the world. He was elected the Honorary President of the International Association of Agricultural Medicine & Rural Health, member of International Academy of Environment Protection. The last monograph of this hardworking healthcare professional seems to be very symbolic: in 1981, Guide "Occupational Health in Agricultural Production" was published under the editorship of Dr Lev I. Medved and his close fellow Dr Yu. I. Kundiyev. In 1982, when Dr Lev I. Medved died, his book won F. F. Erisman Award from the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR

Who was this talented person, the child of his age and the architect of that time? One of his followers, Prof A. P. Dyban said: "He was exacting and kind, rigid and gentle, persistent and patient. I have never seen such a person before. Although in Chelyabinsk, where I studied medicine, he was as old as my son is now". Indeed, an advocate of his Institute and a father for his students was a thirty-five to thirty-six year old man. These words bring his brilliant unique personality back to us.