

Approaching to the 250th anniversary of the Scientific Center of Children's Health

A.A. Baranov, V.Yu. Al'bitskii, S.A. Sher

Scientific Center of Children's Health, Moscow, Russian Federation

**Vera Pavlovna Lebedeva – organizer of the maternity and childhood protection
Institute**

Author affiliation:

Sher Stella Abel'evna, MD, senior research scientist of the social pediatric department at the FSBI RAMS "SCCH"

Address: 2/1, Lomonosovskii ave., Moscow, 119991, **tel.:** +7 (915) 438-69-14, **e-mail:** anastel@mail.ru

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This article is dedicated to the life of professor Vera Pavlovna Lebedeva – head of the maternity and childhood protection (MCP) department at the RSFSR People's Commissariat of Health and one of the founders of the first State scientific maternity and childhood protection institute (SSMCPI) – a predecessor of the USSR AMS Institute of pediatrics. In the 1930s the SSMCPI was named after Lebedeva. This article gives documental archive data, Lebedeva's scientific works, articles from pediatric magazines, colleagues' memoirs which reflected the main milestones of her life and professional activity, theoretical-and-practical and pedagogical in particular. Thanks to V.P. Lebedeva's initiative and activity, the virtually new state MCP system was created in the USSR and the first national scientific institution of a pediatric profile was organized.

Keywords: *V.P. Lebedeva, maternity and childhood protection department, state scientific maternity and childhood protection institute.*

In the 1930s the Central Moscow Maternity and Childhood Protection Institute was called after V.P. Lebedeva – one of the institution's founders.

Vera Pavlovna Lebedeva (née Livadonova) was born on 9 (21 stilo novo) September 1881 in a large family in Nizhniy Novgorod. Her father died in 1892 during the cholera epidemic and the mother and her 7 children left with no means of support were sheltered by the Nizhniy Novgorod "Widow house" under the aegis of merchant-

manufacturer N.A. Bugrov; the Nizhniy Novgorod charitable institution “Aid to the talented children” put Vera Livadonova to the gymnasium. Having graduated with a gold medal, the girl worked for 2 years as a teacher of Russian in Arzamas and in 1901 went to Petersburg where she entered the Women’s Medical Institute [1].

However, Vera did not only study medical sciences in Petersburg, but also took part in the revolutionary movement, on which she had become keen back in Nizhniy Novgorod. In 1904 she was conditionally expelled from the institute as a member of the students’ revolutionary circle and she had to return to her native town. There she met her husband-to-be – P.I. Lebedev-Polyanskiy, who had studied at Dorpat University (Tartu, Estonia) but was exiled for participating in students’ revolutionary actions to his native city Vladimir, from where he moved to Nizhniy Novgorod. As a Red Cross worker, Vera Livadonova took part in organizing P.I. Lebedev-Polyanskiy’s escape from the prison hospital to Finland after the action of Sormovo workers in 1905; she also moved to Finland after having her flat searched several times; there she met V.I. Lenin, N.K. Krupskaya and A.V. Lunacharskiy.

In 1907 P.I. Lebedev-Polyanskiy was arrested again, but he managed to escape to Switzerland. Left alone in Finland, V.P. Lebedeva decided to return to Petersburg to graduate from the medical institute, but she was arrested on the way for carrying illegal literature and sent to prison while being heavily pregnant [2].

V.P. Lebedeva graduated from the medical institute only in 1910 and started working as a district doctor at the Sudogda Zemstvo hospital of the Vladimir Province, where she won the building of a new outpatient clinic and introduction of an obstetrician on the staff. Moreover, Vera Pavlovna managed to organize warm breakfasts for the village school children, carried out medical-enlightening work, but was dismissed in 1.5 years as politically suspect at governor’s behest [3].

In 1912 V.P. Lebedeva had to move to her husband to Geneva, where she lived and worked at an obstetric-gynecologic clinic for 5 years. Politicking in emigration, V.P. Lebedeva met A.M. Kollontai; their frequent meetings influenced Lebedeva’s future activity in the sphere of maternity and childhood protection (MCP) [2].

In May 1917, after the February Revolution, V.P. Lebedeva returned to Russia from emigration and worked as a doctor at the Petrograd cable factory’s insurance office. After the October Revolution she was elected a member of the first Board of the People’s Commissariat for Education (headed by A.V. Lunacharskiy) responsible for organizing measures of protecting rights and health of mothers and children [3].

In November 1917 an MCP department was founded under the People's Commissariat of State Charity (later known as the People's Commissariat of Social Welfare) headed by A.M. Kollontai. V.P. Lebedeva was assigned the head of the MCP Department after the Soviet Government moved to Moscow in March 1918. It was very difficult to work, as there was neither experience nor skilled personnel. MCP institutions were founded and courses for MCP organizers were opened at her initiative. She headed the struggle with the then custom of abandoning babies and went into the Commission on improving children's life and struggling with juvenile homelessness [4].

V.P. Lebedeva played a great role in the transfer of MCP system into the jurisdiction of healthcare in 1920; she was supported by A.M. Kollontai, N.K. Krupskaya and personally by V.I. Lenin who "made an order of fully transferring MCP to the People's Commissariat of Health, which undoubtedly mattered for its subsequent successful development" [5].

V.P. Lebedeva always took leading positions in the MCP system and considered this work the most important for her during the Soviet power. She participated in organizing the first all-Russian and all-Soviet MCP congresses. It was decided to organize antenatal and pediatric clinics, day nurseries and infant feeding centers during the I all-Russian conference of MCP workers in 1920 at the report of Vera Pavlovna. On the II all-Russian conference of MCP workers in 1925 V.P. Lebedeva paid much attention to the fight against children's mortality in countryside and the necessity of opening pediatric clinics in each volost [3].

One of the most significant achievements of V.P. Lebedeva was the involvement of experienced scientists-specialists to the work on organizing MCP institutions; in May 1918 they formed a Medical commission composed of pediatricians G.N. Speranskiy, A.A. Kisel, V.I. Molchanov, N.F. Altgauzen, S.O. Dulitskiy and obstetricians-gynecologists G.L. Grauerman and N.A. Rakhmanov. The Commission was to reorganize orphanages, especially the Moscow Orphanage, and organize a network of "Mother-and-Child Homes". V.P. Lebedeva invented the idea of founding the MCP Institute to develop and scientifically substantiate organization of medical help to children, treatment and prevention of diseases, upbringing in children's groups.

In 1922 V.P. Lebedeva initiated and organized the State scientific maternity and infancy protection institute (SSMIPI) together with G.N. Speranskiy; it was attributed to as the higher theoretical-and-practical and educational institution. Specialized clinical departments, laboratory-diagnostic services and other auxiliary scientific departments were

organized and model open-end institutions (day nursery and pediatric clinic) were founded within the Institute.

The Institute conducted not only large scientific and practical work, but also pedagogical work, which V.P. Lebedeva attached high importance to. She wrote that the Central MCP Institute, where training courses for doctors and nurses specializing in the sphere of maternity and childhood health protection have been being created since its first days, did a great pioneer work.

In the school year 1925/1926 the first national departments of physiology, pathology, pedology and practical early childhood pedagogics, social hygiene of mother and child were launched at SSMIPI.

V.P. Lebedeva headed the department of social hygiene of mother and child which united all links of the complicated institute's structure and which was considered the central one. Involved in research and pedagogic activity, V.P. Lebedeva read a course of lectures, conducted seminars and workshops. In addition, department's employees threw light upon the issues of social-legal maternity and childhood protection and sanitary statistics within their courses. The monographs and magazine articles published in Russian and foreign literature favored the broadening of knowledge on the maternity and childhood health protection, fight with high women's and children's morbidity and mortality thanks to their subject matter and concept description; they also determined the importance of measures to prevent these diseases. Anthropometric room, standardization bureau, statistical room and quite an extensive scientific library were opened under the department. Moreover, 3 clinics – antenatal, pediatric and legal – were functioning under the department; the conducted work on protecting maternity and childhood health and social rights [6].

In 1928-1929 V.P. Lebedeva organized 6 expeditions to several RSFSR regions to collect massive social-and-living material in order to throw light upon problems of maternity and childhood on the periphery at the expense of special resources of the People's Commissariat of Health and Cooperation [6].

Professor V.P. Lebedeva headed the department of social hygiene of mother and child until 1931. Then the department was transferred to the newly founded Institute of advanced medical studies.

In 1929 in a Board's meeting of the People's Commissariat of Health N.A. Semashko proposed approving the Resolution of the IV all-Soviet Congress on MCP of naming the SSMIPI after Vera Pavlovna Lebedeva [7].

In 1935 she was conferred the MD degree [1].

Over the years of her activity, professor V.P. Lebedeva wrote a big number of scientific articles and a range of books on the various issues of MCP, social obstetrics, role of nurses and obstetricians and medical advanced training. Her scientific works were put into the Great Medical Encyclopedia and published as a self-standing collection “Fulfilled stages: articles and speeches. Issues of building maternity and infancy protection” (1927) and as brochures “Several results” (1928), “Maternity and infancy protection in the Soviet State” (1934) etc.

In her collection “Fulfilled stages” V.P. Lebedeva wrote about the ways of building MCP system in the country, MCP Department’s objectives, work of SSMIPI and other relevant issues of her time. Thus, the author claims in her article “New stage in the MCP development” that the MCP Department’s activity objective is “to make infants and mothers the center of attention of the Soviet governing bodies... and doctors”, that “the children’s mortality issue added a practical, vital meaning to the purely theoretical interest” and that “the foundation of an institution that would centralize the scientific experience of the republic and other countries was authoritatively demanded by life itself”. That is why Vera Pavlovna pointed out the objectives that arise before the State MCP Institute as a theoretical-and-practical and educational institution: studying physical and mental spheres of a healthy or sick small child (0-3 years of age); organizing pilot-demonstration MCP institutions; assigning a specialization to doctors, nurses and obstetricians in the sphere of MCP; assistance to the MCP Department of the People’s Commissariat of Health in spreading scientific information on small children, their physiology, pathology, hygiene and pedagogics [4].

Summing up her experience in the book “Maternity and infancy protection in the Soviet State”, V.P. Lebedeva analyzes social foundations of MCP. She wrote: “If we regard the problem as a subject of an independent course in the curriculum of a medical or research institute, then MCP is considered, and rightfully so, the special part of social hygiene” [5].

She wrote that the social hygiene organizes the social environment in such a manner that those social factors that influence health negatively would be eliminated or defused by studying social environment and the whole range of factors reflecting on the group health. From this point of view, MCP is a system of measures taken by the government “to create optimal conditions for a woman to fulfill her production function and for the normal development of small children’s upbringing, providing a woman at the same time with full-value in fulfilling the socially responsible reproductive function” [5].

V.P. Lebedeva regarded “MCP as a social system only due to the struggle of the working class with the labor-management relations characterizing one or another period of historical development” due to her revolutionary outlook [5]. That is why Vera Pavlovna believed that only the October Revolution, one of the slogans of which was the emancipation of women, could solve the problem of MCP in the country. At the same time she wrote that in prerevolutionary Russia there were rudiments of MCP in the form of a few liberal charitable foundations: Children’s Mortality Union (1904) founded by a doctor N.A. Russkikh; MCP society in Moscow (1908); Moscow Children’s Mortality Society (1909), all-Russian MCP guardianship (1913) [8].

Emphasizing the peculiarity of the Soviet MCP system, V.P. Lebedeva wrote that her objective was “not only fighting children’s mortality, not only creating the most favorable conditions for childbirth and rational upbringing”, but she also “always speaks of women in the labor process... of building new cultural life and tries to facilitate her fulfilling these functions without prejudice to her biological function associated with reproduction”. Moreover, according to the author, MCP was fulfilling social-hygienic objectives due to the extreme backwardness of population in terms of sanitation and social hygiene.

Speaking of MCP system prospects, V.P. Lebedeva argued that MCP would not lose its significance after children’s mortality would have been considerably reduced – it would only change its structure, methods and forms of work, switching to “the organization of children’s life on a new, collective basis, massive involvement of women into the settlement of economic and cultural targets” [5]. Summing up, she concludes that “MCP is extremely flexible as it adapts forms and methods of its work on every single stage of historic development” [5].

In terms of social activity, it should be noted that V.P. Lebedeva was an acting editor for a magazine “Maternity and infancy protection”, primarily dedicated to organizational questions. At the same time the “Magazine on studying early childhood” (edited by G.N. Speranskiy) appeared; it reported scientific and clinical issues.

V.P. Lebedeva headed the MCP system at the RSFSR People’s Commissariat of Health until 1931. In 1931-1934 she was deputy to the RSFSR People’s Commissar of Social Welfare, in 1934-1938 – deputy to the State Sanitation Inspector General of the RSFSR People’s Commissariat of Health and in 1938-1959 she headed the Central Institute of advanced medical studies.

She was awarded the Orders of Lenin, Order of the Red Banner of Labor and numerous medals for her active labor activity [9].

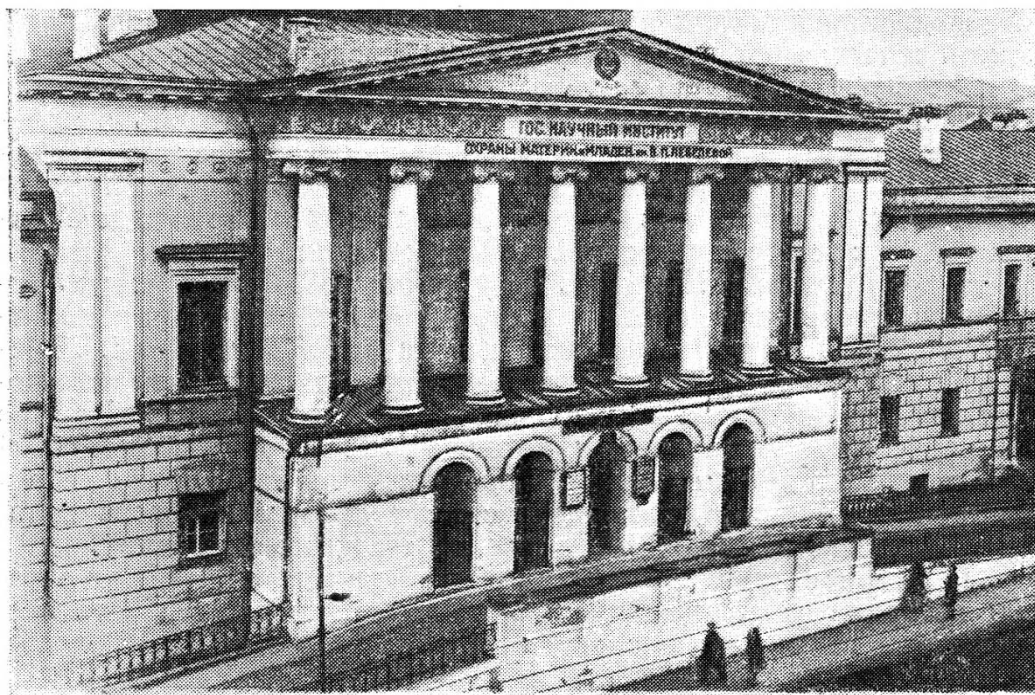
V.P. Lebedeva died on 10 December 1968.

V.P. Lebedeva is rightfully considered one of the head organizers of the Soviet MCP system and one of the founders of the MCP Institute – the first state scientific pediatric institution.

Pic. 1. Vera Pavlovna Lebedeva



Pic. 2. Lebedeva State Scientific Maternity and Infancy Protection Institute



Государственный научный институт ОММ в Москве

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