

History of dermatology and venereology in Serbia – part IV/1: Dermatovenereology in Serbia from 1919 – 1945

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Abstract

After the First World War, Serbia was ravaged and in ruins, whereas the Health Care Service was destroyed. Organization and reorganization of the Health Care Service started with a fight against the spread of infectious diseases. Foundation of specialized health institutions was among the first tasks. As early as 1920, an *Outpatient Service for Skin and Venereal Diseases* was established and managed by Prof. Đorđe Đorđević. In 1922, after he was appointed as Associate Professor at the newly established *Faculty of Medicine* in Belgrade, he founded a *Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases*, and acted as its first director. In 1928, a *Municipal Outpatient Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases* was founded, whereas in 1938 a modern organization of the Service was established in a new building. After a break during the I World War, the *Dermatovenereology Department of the General Military Hospital* in Belgrade, founded in 1909, continued working until the Second World War. In Novi Sad, the *City Hospital* was founded in 1909, including a *Dermatovenereology Department*. After the First World War, in 1921, Dr. Jovan Nenadović founded a *Department of Skin and Venereal Diseases* (100 beds) in the *General Public Hospital*, as well as, an independent *Public Outpatient Clinic* for free-of-charge treatment of patients with venereal diseases. In Niš, the first *Organization Unit for Venereal Diseases* was founded in 1912, but the *Department of Venereal Diseases* was founded in 1921, and it was managed by Dr. Petar Davidović, while in 1927 a *Department of Skin and Venereal Diseases* was established within the *General Public Hospital*. In 1920, a *Dermatovenereology Department of the Military Hospital* in Niš was established. Apart from these, as early as 1921, there was a total of 7 Outpatient Clinics in Serbia, and in 1923 there were 14 venereal departments, and 1 dermatovenereology department.

After the First World War, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was proclaimed in 1918, as well as the first Ministry of Public Health (MPH). Thus, the whole enlarged country was integrated into a unique system of health care delivery, although the initial positions of certain parts were quite different. The seven-year war (1912 – 1918), occupation and epidemics of infectious diseases led to a massive loss of lives and medical personnel in Serbia (1). Out of nearly three million inhabitants of Serbia before the First World War, over 1.200.000 people lost their lives (2), including 35% of physicians (1). The country was ravaged and in ruins (1, 3), whereas the Health Care Service was destroyed. Infectious and venereal diseases spread, and it was necessary to start organization and reorganization of the sanitary service (1). Again,

it meant starting from scratch, in somewhat better circumstances than earlier, because some habits and laws have been preserved, and the health care service had had a certain tradition.

Legislation and Organization of the Dermatovenereology Service

Shortly after the war, proper legal regulations were brought, but they were replaced in 1921 by the *Law on the Foundation of Special Institutions for Infectious Diseases and Free-of Charge Health Care Service* (1, 2). Based on this Law, the MPH was responsible for the: detection, eradication and treatment of acute and chronic infectious diseases, keeping strict records of patients and for health education of the population (1). *The Law on the Eradication of Infectious Diseases*,

passed in 1930, included the following guidelines for venereology: foundation of institutions for free-of-charge treatment; employment of professionally educated physicians; foundation of hospital departments for venereal diseases; units for prevention of venereal diseases; institutions for the treatment of children with congenital syphilis; mobile outpatient services; forced treatment, and taking special measures in counties where more than 5% of population were infected by syphilis. Reporting diseases was mandatory in cases where spread of infection was anticipated. In 1931 and 1934, *Laws on Eradication of Endemic Syphilis (1)* and of *Venereal Diseases* were passed, respectively (4). Skin diseases were covered by General Legislation.

Three basic problems were recognized in the organization of public health care: insufficient number of hospitals and physicians, and almost complete lack of bacteriological laboratories (1). The first two problems were directly related to dermatovenereology.

Health Institutions

The Outpatient Service for Skin and Venereal Diseases (OSSVDs) was founded by a special regulation of the MPH in Belgrade in 1920, since it was the Center for organization of Sanitary Services in Serbia (1). Firstly it was situated in Dečanska Street, then in Vidinska Street (today George Washington street), which remained recognized as a location of the first dermatovenereology institutions in Belgrade, but also by a great number of brothels, which were there before and after the First World War (5). Dr. Đorđe Đorđević (Figure 1) was the Head of the OSSVDs, and Dr. Sima Ilić (Figure 2), was the dermatovenereologist-practitioner (6). Both of them were very important for the development of the Serbian dermatovenereology. The Service provided a temporary residence to the newly founded *Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases* (see below). When the Clinic was moved in 1925, the OSSVDs continued working as the institution of the MPH, and Dr. Sima Ilić was the Head of the Service (6).

The Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases (CSVDs) was founded in 1922, when dr Đorđević was appointed as Associate Professor at the newly established Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade (1920) (7). The Clinic had no capacities for in-patients (8), but all other health and



Figure 1. Prof. Dr. Đorđe Đorđević

educational activities were exercised at the OSSVDs, based on the agreement between the Faculty of Medicine and the MPH (6). Till 1932, the CSVDs has been moved two more times into private residences, unfortunately always in inadequate premises. Hospital departments were founded in 1925, whereas in 1932, the CSVDs was moved to the facilities of the Institute of Anatomy, which had previously been used by the (cancelled) *Clinic of Applied Anatomy* (6) (Figure 3). The working conditions were somewhat better, and apart from hospital departments and laboratories, in 1935 the Clinic possessed a library with 700 books and 450 journals, as well as a moulage collection of 400 exhibits (7). Apart from this, in 1935 a Specialized Outpatient Service was opened for treatment of



Figure 2. Prof. Dr. Sima Ilić

students (9). During the Second World War, the occupation authorities took possession of the Clinic with the entire inventory, so that only the Outpatient Service continued working. After the Germans had left in 1944, part of the library and the moulage collection remained behind (10). The first Head of the

CSVDs was Professor Đorđe Đorđević (1922 – 1935), followed by Professor M. Kićevac (1935 – 1940) (7), and Dr. Sava Bugarski (1940 – 1944) (6,11).

The Dermatovenereology Departments of the General Public Hospital (GPH), founded in Belgrade at the end of the XIX century (see part III/1), the first dermatovenereology departments for in-patients in Serbia, continued working after the First World War.

*The Municipal Outpatient Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases in Belgrade was founded on September 15, 1928. During the following ten-year period, it was housed in inadequate private facilities, with small and disorganized settings (Figure 4). When the economic crisis ended in the 1930s, a new building was built in 1938 in Vidinska Street (17, George Washington Street), and it was called the *City Outpatient Clinic*, today *City Department of Skin and Venereal Diseases*. It was a modern building and it was the first institution of its kind in Central Europe (Figure 5). The Head of the Institution was Dr. Jovan Spasojević who worked with Dr. Mihailo Gačić, both dermatovenereologists. Its significance can easily be seen from the following data: during 1928, a total of 1.072 patients were examined, in 1929, 15.217 patients, and in 1937, 51.194 patients had undergone examination (5).*

The Department of Skin and Venereal Diseases (100 beds) of the General Public Hospital (GPH) (Figure 6),



Figure 3. The Institute of Anatomy in Belgrade, a temporary residence of the Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases in 1932 (indicated by an arrow)



Figure 4. The Municipal Outpatient Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases in Belgrade



Figure 5. The City Outpatient Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases in Belgrade

and the independent *Public Outpatient Clinic* for free-of-charge treatment of patients with venereal diseases in Novi Sad, were founded in 1921, by Dr. Jovan Nenadović, the first Serbian dermatovenereologist in Vojvodina. He was the director of both institutions (12). We must also note that in 1909, the *City Hospital* with a *Dermatovenereology Department* was founded (13), but after the First World War there was no place for treatment of patients with skin and venereal diseases (12). Apart from that, an *Anti-Venereal Outpatient Department* was founded in 1925 (13). Further development of dermatovenereology in Vojvodina started with these institutions with close cooperation with the Belgrade Dermatology School. Dermatovenereologists, who took part in the development of dermatovenereology, and in the work of institutions of that time, were also members of the *Dermatovenereology Section of the Serbian Medical Association*.

The first *Organization Unit for Venereal Diseases* in Niš was founded in 1912, and in 1920 it was moved into the bungalows of the *City Hospital*. The *Department for Venereal Diseases* with an Outpatient facility outside the Hospital circle was founded in 1921 and it was managed by Dr. Petar Davidović. A *Department for Skin and Venereal Diseases* of the GPH in Niš was opened in 1927. Its director was Dr. Petar Zurin, a dermatovenereologist (1, 14). After the foundation of the *Faculty of Medicine* in Niš (1960) it had become a teaching hospital for medical students (14) (Figure 7).

In 1921, at the initiative of Prof. Đ. Dorđević, Serbia had complete outpatient health care centers in Niš, Petrovac, Užice, Boljevac County, Subotica, Veliki Bečkerek (Zrenjanin) and Mitrovica (15). As soon as 1923, general hospitals had 14 venereal departments and 1 dermatovenereology department,



Figure 6. The General Public Hospital in Novi Sad with the Department of Skin and Venereal Diseases (Archive of Vojvodina)

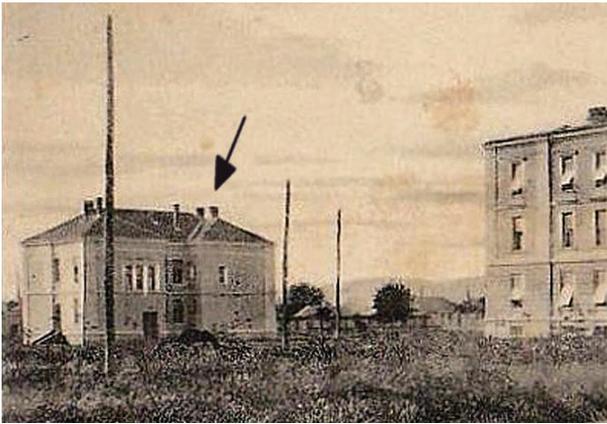


Figure 7. The General Public Hospital in Niš, the present Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases (indicated by an arrow)

in Subotica (16). It is noticeable that these departments were called “venereal”, just as the physicians were called “venereologists” (1), pointing once again to the fact that venereal diseases were still a major dermatovenereology problem.

The *Dermatovenereology Department* of the *General Military Hospital* in Belgrade, founded in 1909 (see part III/1), worked until the First World War, when the *General Military Hospital*, under the Austrian occupation, became “*Das K. und K Reservspital Brško*” (17). After the war, the Department continued working till the beginning of the Second World War.

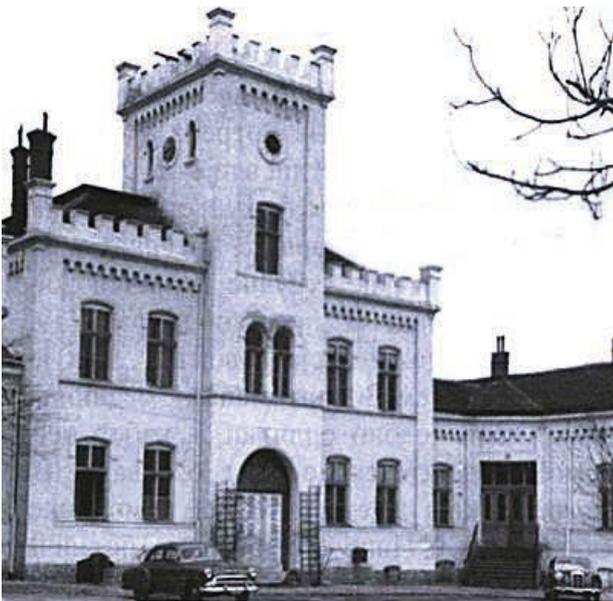


Figure 8. The Main Military Hospital in Belgrade with the Dermatovenereology Department

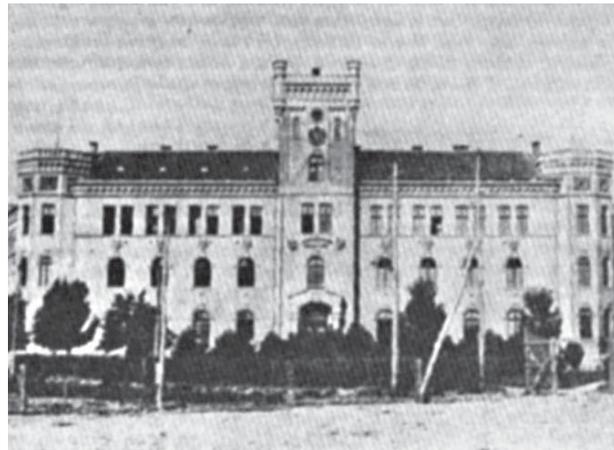


Figure 9. The Military Hospital in Niš with the Dermatovenereology Department

From 1941 to 1944, the occupation authorities once again used the *General Military Hospital* for their purposes (18). After the war, it continued working as the Main Military Hospital, moreover, the Dermatovenereology Department continued working as well (19) (Figure 8).

After the First World War, in 1920, new departments were founded in the *Military Hospital* in Niš (Army Military Hospital for the territory of Moravska military district) (Figure 9), including a *Dermatovenereology Department* (20).

The first hospital for the treatment of syphilis in Serbia was founded in 1851 in Knjaževac (see part II), but during time it was transformed into the *County General Hospital* (21). With the archive destroyed, there is no evidence of its work, but it is apparent that patients with syphilis prevailed, because it is well known that at the beginning of the 1950's, this was the most outspread and best known area with endemic syphilis in Serbia (22).

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Abbreviations

- CSVDs – Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases
 GPH – General Public Hospital
 MPH – Ministry of Public Health
 OSSVDs – Outpatient Service for Skin and Venereal Diseases

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