
from the West). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for Kremlin physicians to transport blood samples needing special analysis to Finland. Top Western specialists are sometimes called in for delicate operations.

Cardiovascular problems are the concern of a growing number of Soviet medical researchers. In 1983, Moscow christened a vast, new 23-building headquarters for its national Cardiology Research Center, built at a cost of some \$117 million. The scientists have their work cut out for them: While deaths from heart disease and other cardiovascular ills dropped steadily between 1960 and 1980 in the United States, they doubled in the Soviet Union. Alcoholism is a major contributing factor, along with smoking, which is on the increase despite vigorous public health campaigns. (Since 1977, some cigarette packs have borne the warning: "Smoking is Hazardous to Your Health.") Cancer, the number two killer and also on the rise (as it is in the United States), is the domain of other specialized hospitals and research institutes.*

No Easy Cure

Accidents, poisonings, and injuries, long the third leading cause of death (as in the United States) have also increased in number, but apparently not as rapidly as respiratory diseases. According to Feshbach, the incidence of influenza, pneumonia, and similar maladies quintupled between 1960 and 1979; they may now constitute the Soviet Union's number three cause of death. Other infectious diseases—whooping cough, diphtheria, measles, mumps, scarlet fever—have also been on the rise. The explanation? Feshbach speculates that Soviet vaccines and medications are inferior in quality, insufficiently refrigerated during shipping, and administered under unsanitary conditions that nullify their effects. And it is also possible that vaccine manufacturers are diluting their products to meet their production quotas.

The harshest indictment of Soviet health care, however, is the unprecedented upsurge in deaths of children before their first birthday. Between 1970 and 1980, these increased by

*If past performance is any guide, there is little cause for optimism about Soviet research. Russian medical scientists have pioneered a few new medical techniques—an ultrasound treatment that shatters gallstones without surgery, a surgical procedure called radial keratotomy that alleviates severe myopia—but they lag behind in most areas. One reason is money. The United States outspends the Soviet Union 25 to 1 in medical research. Complicating matters is the lack of cross-fertilization between theory and practice: Physicians are barred from laboratories, and researchers are confined mostly to their institutes and seldom teach.

roughly 25 percent, to 28 per 1,000 births. Better medical reporting in remote rural areas may account for 25 to 50 percent of the rise, but poor maternal health, exacerbated by smoking and drinking, as well as the revival of widespread infectious diseases doubtless play a large role. A concerted prenatal care and education effort by Moscow seems to have had little success. (The Soviets have published no official data on infant mortality since 1975.)

What conclusions can one draw about the overall quality of medical care in the Soviet Union?

With its plethora of physicians and hospital beds, Soviet medicine seems impressive. Its progress since the 1917 Revolution has been monumental. And yet the quality of care is low by Western standards. Indeed, in some respects, it resembles what one sees in the Third World.

Part of the problem is the Kremlin's tightfisted approach to medical care, which is unlikely to ease as long as military budgets remain high. But it would be foolish to argue that there is nothing wrong with Soviet medicine that a few billion rubles would not solve. The problem is not only that Soviet hospitals are short of cash but that the factories do not manufacture certain antibiotics, sutures, or respirators, and that the medical industry's suppliers do not deliver sufficient raw materials and component parts. The dead hand of bureaucracy is everywhere. The ills of Soviet medicine are the same as those of the Soviet system in general, and they cannot be cured without first treating the underlying problems.
