

# **NEEDS FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION IN A NEW SITUATION**

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Estonia has come from a totally different sphere of medicine. Decades of separation from the rest of the world created a different way of understanding diseases, while even treatment and diagnosis were different. The same trends can be observed at present in Russian medicine. Such a situation developed mostly due to lack of information, which was the result of barriers to access of information and barriers in the way of understanding information.

The most important and, in fact, the only way to receive information was to use paper carriers of information — books, journals etc. The number of copies that arrived in the Soviet Union was extremely limited — usually one copy being available in a central library in Moscow. Still another barrier was created by the state as a general measure to limit information from 'outside' — this was the language barrier. Foreign languages were practically excluded from school curricula, and several generations grew up without the least knowledge of any foreign language. Even in Moscow, information was not available for most medical scientists. In order to maintain a certain level of medical care, a number of Soviet guidelines were developed, however, ignoring totally the principles implemented worldwide.

At the same time, even at that time the number of scientific theses was mostly the same as elsewhere in the world. A number of candidate and doctoral theses were completed by professors who were not able to read in any foreign language and performed by hard-working students who were as ignorant. Therefore it is not surprising that totally new systems were developed for the diagnosis and treatment of different diseases. However, the society, being as ignorant as its paternalistic medicine, was not satisfied.

Nowadays many things have changed. Estonia has entered a totally new world with a different culture, knowledge and level of medicine. We have joined the large international family, and the demands placed on our medicine and doctors have changed dramatically. Our patients expect us to be as knowledgeable and use as up-to date methods as doctors everywhere in the world.

The two major barriers have been crushed down. Foreign languages have been acquired very quickly and nearly everybody is able to read in English. We have largely forgotten Soviet medicine, although older colleagues are still in the habit of thinking in the old way. But where can one find new, contemporary knowledge and how to gain access to it?

Free information is available in the internet but it is not available to everybody in the countryside; books are still very expensive and not every doctor can afford buying for himself a handbook. Hence the shortest and probably the best way to improve the general level of knowledge is to train teachers and scientists, i.e. the staff of the University hospital.