

MEDICINE IN LIFE AND WORKS OF VARLAM SHALAMOV: DOCTOR IN THE PENITENTIARY SYSTEM OF THE KOLYMA GULAG

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Key words: medical service of the Gulag, Kolyma tales, medic as a defender of prisoners, humane qualities of a physician

Abstract: The medical system of the Kolyma Gulag in the late 30's - early 50's of the 20th century ensured the functioning of the "macrosystem" of forced labor, which became the principal social and production factor of the Stalinist USSR. The most important source of information on health and, more precisely, on survival of prisoners of the Gulag, were fiction works, first of all, "Kolyma Tales" by Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov, of which almost 50% are devoted to the description of camp medicine. The writer, who worked for many years as a camp physician, left a detailed picture of the medical system of the Gulag, and many of its particulars: images of doctors, patients, "simulators", administrators; description of camp hospitals, doctor – patient – camp authorities' relationships and doctor – patient – criminal world's relationships; clinical cases that he observed; description of camp hygiene and sanitation. The writer unambiguously characterizes doctors as the only defenders of prisoners endowed with great power, because none of the camp authorities could control the actions of a specialist. "Almost always camp supervisors were at enmity with their doctors; the work itself bred them in different directions." Humane qualities of the physician Varlam Shalamov put him one step further the narrowly understood professional duty.

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