

<https://doi.org/10.31288/oftalmolzh202425760>

Skorodynska V.V., Academician V.P. Filatov's faithful assistant, strong supporter in science, and wife

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In 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC; Geneva, Switzerland) marked 160 years of working with victims of conflict and violence. The first Geneva Convention was attended by 16 states; it was adopted in 1864 and pertained to protections for those wounded in war, and the inviolability of medical professionals who were there to assist them.

There was a Red Cross Sister of Mercy in the history of the Filatov institute; that was Varvara Vasylivna Skorodynska. At the age of twenty, she completed a nursing course prematurely and went to the front to nurse the sick and wounded during World War I in 1913-1914 (Photographs 1, 2) [1].

When the Civil War ended in 1918, V.V. Skorodynska started working as surgery nurse at the Ophthalmic Clinic of Odesa Medical Institute; the clinic was headed by Prof. V.P. Filatov (Photograph 3).

At that time, the would-be academician was dedicating his time and efforts to the issues of corneal transplantation, and donor material was required to answer his scientific and clinical hypotheses. V.V. Skorodynska was simultaneously working as surgery nurse at the ophthalmic clinic and studying at Odesa Medical Institute, and understood the importance and prospects of corneal transplantation. She voluntarily committed to not the most pleasant work of searching for donor material. As a former Sister of Mercy, she was experienced in socializing with different people, and was able to obtain the agreement of the deceased's relatives for the removal of cadaver eyes for graft purposes. A special permit for the removal of cadaver eyes had to be obtained from forensic morgue director. Moreover, she had to visit the regional NKVS (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) office for special permits [2].

At first, morgue staff and families of deceased's individuals and others strongly opposed to organ removal at death and even nick named her "cadaver eye miner". But the young girl went on persuading morgue staff and pathologists that the removal of cadaver eyes was really in need for performing keratoplasty surgery. For this purpose, she practiced inviting them to the clinic and acquainting them with the patients who had their vision restored after donor corneal transplantation.

Her opponents gradually became supporters, calling her any time of the day to inform about the occurrence of the required material. There were many who understood for what great purpose this nice girl was visiting their office and what a difficult job she was doing. Varvara mastered the technique of material disinfecting and removing, and there was a significant improvement in settling the issues of keratoplasty. V.P. Filatov has demonstrated that a cadaver donor cornea stored in an ice chest at 2-4°C is best suited for keratoplasty.



Photograph 1. Young V.V. Skorodynska, a nursing course trainee, in 1914 (the photograph is being published for the first time)



Photograph 2. V.V. Skorodynska, a Sister of Mercy, during World War I, in 1914 (the photograph is being published for the first time)



Photograph 3. V.V. Skorodynska, a surgery nurse at the Ophthalmic Clinic of Odesa Medical Institute, 1918 (the photograph is being published for the first time).

Who knows, if this “cadaver eye miner” was unavailable, how much time Prof. V.P. Filatov would have taken to achieve these results? Soon thereafter, the removal of cadaver eyes for corneal graft purposes was legalized in the USSR. V.V. Skorodynska graduated from the medical institute and changed her position from a surgery nurse to the Prof. V.P. Filatov’s assistant at all difficult surgeries he was conducting. In 1936, she joined the staff of the newly established Research Institute of Experimental Ophthalmology. First publications by Dr. Skorodynska, a researcher, “Instruction on obtaining and preserving cadaver material” [3], “On regeneration of the corneal epithelium from isolated cadaver eyes at low temperature” [4], “Curative keratoplasty in keratitis” [5], “Curative keratoplasty in recurrent pterygium” [6], “Bilateral keratoplasty with a long follow-up” [7] and others, appeared in the literature.

Varvara Vasylivna began assisting Acad. V.P. Filatov in his works on the clinical application of tissue therapy in keratitis, burns, etc (Photographs 4, 6).

In 1945, a department for curative application of tissue preparations in ophthalmology was established in the institute, with V.V. Skorodynska being the first head of the department.

In 1946, she successfully defended her Cand Sc (Med) thesis “Curative value of preparations from preserved aloe leaves” [8]; the original of the thesis along with her photograph is now carefully kept in the library of the Filatov’s institute. From that time, tissue therapy has been actively used in the treatment of patients with combat injuries and their sequelae [9] and other disorders [10-16].

V.V. Skorodynska was a researcher and doctor of various research and clinical interests. She conducted research on the state of eyes [17] and development of myopia in premature children [18, 19], issues of an increase in refractive error during the period of intensive growth in children [20], causes of the development of school and complicated myopia and treatment of these disorders with tissue therapy [21, 22], along with numerous studies on keratoplasty and tissue therapy.

During a 33-year period of her research activities, Varvara Vasylivna published 71 works on the important issues of tissue therapy in ophthalmology.

After the death of Acad. V.P. Filatov, Varvara Vasylivna Skorodynska was determined to continue what he had started (Photograph 7) and kept implementing his ideas and instructions.

V.V. Skorodynska established the first V.P. Filatov’s museum in the institute [23] and persuaded the government officials to make a decision on giving a status of the Filatov’s Memorial House Museum to the dacha where he had been living his last years.



Photograph 4. V.P. Filatov and V.V. Skorodynska working at the tissue preservation laboratory, Tashkent, 1943.



Photograph 5. V.V. Skorodynska, a Cand Sc (Med) thesis defendant, 1946 (the photograph is being published for the first time).



Photograph 6. V.V. Skorodynska discussing current affairs with Acad. V.P. Filatov at the dacha at the French boulevard, 1952 (the photograph is being published for the first time).



Photograph 7. V.V. Skorodynska with colleagues, Acad. N.A. Puchkovska, institute director, Ie.A. Budilova, chief physician, and A.A. Barkhash, head of the pediatric department (sitting left), and T.V. Shlapak (sitting right)

She kept carefully collecting various things associated with him. Particularly, she was collecting his artworks like drawings and art etudes, and presented some of them to institute staff members as memorial pieces. She acted as an only guide in the museum, and was doing this on a voluntary basis, till her last days. V.V. Skorodynska went into eternity at the age of 93, and was buried besides her husband, Acad. V.P. Filatov, at the Second Christian Cemetery, opposite the church, in Odesa.

This year marks the 35th anniversary of her death. She spent her life along with the outstanding scientist, a person of great scientific aspirations and a pioneer of corneal transplantation who has achieved national and international acceptance in his lifetime, and established a new field in medicine and biology, tissue therapy (treatment with biogenic stimulators). Throughout her life, Varvara Vasylivna Skorodynska supported the endeavors of her mentor and husband, and provided him with favorable conditions for his creative work.

Both authors are indebted to D.V. Gorshkov, head of the science library, Filatov Institute of Eye Disease and Tissue Therapy, and Iu.M. Zukhina, head of the Filatov Museum, for providing archive materials and photographs.

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Disclosures

Received 18.11.2023

Accepted 01.02.2024