Popularising medical knowledge in the semi-scholarly journals in the 18th century

( Popularyzowanie wiedzy lekarskiej w czasopismach półuczonych w XVIII wieku)

E Wójcik 1 A, B, D, G Wrona 2 E, F, R Zając 2 C

Abstract – In the late 18th century, nineteen semi-scholarly journals were published across the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was aimed at bringing scientific knowledge a bit closer to the general public. Only one of them, „Praktyka Lekarska” [Medical Practice] was dedicated to medical matters, though. Nine of them also addressed a number of issues related to raising popular awareness of medical advances during the Enlightenment. These were „Nowe Wiadomości Ekonomiczne i Uczone” [The New Economic and Scholarly News] (1758-1761), "Wiadomości Literackie" [The Literary Newsletter] (1760-1763), „Polak Patriot” [Being a Polish Patriot] (1785), „Pamiętnik Polityczny i Historyczny” [Political and Historical Diary] (1782-1795), „Różne Uwagi Fizyczno-Chemicznego Warszawskiego Towarzystwa” [Assorted Notes of the Warsaw Physics and Chemistry Society] (1769), „Magazyn Warszawski” [The Warsaw Magazine] (1784-1785), „Biblioteka Fizykoko-Ekonomiczna nauczająca i bawiąca” [The Physics and Economics Library - offering scholarly knowledge and light entertainment] (1788), „Zabawy Obywatelskie” [Citizens Having Fun] (1792-1793), and „Dziennik Uniwersalny” [The Universal Daily] (1795).

These publications were to a large extent comprised of reprints from foreign periodicals, encyclopaedias, and guides, mostly of German and French origin. The Polish publishers aimed to highlight the good European models with regard to overall organization of public healthcare, and professional education of physicians financed out of the state coffers. Attempts were also made to pass on the know-how in the area of preventive medicine, offer some tips on how to pursue a healthy lifestyle embracing healthy dietary habits, staying away from alcoholic beverages, and pursuit of outdoor activities. Gluttony, drunkenness, laziness, and generally wantonly lifestyle were most definitely stigmatized. An interdependence between one’s health and personal hygiene was also highlighted. The semi-scholarly journals offered plenty of advice on the principles of caring for the sick and the convalescent, pregnant women, and infants. Readers were made familiar with the procedures to be followed during epidemics, as well as offered specific medical advice for curing all sorts of ailments. The basic idea the editors tried to convey to their readers was an old adage that one’s good health was a God’s gift. In fact, they did their best to debunk a popular myth purporting all diseases and epidemics to be resultant from God’s punishment. The semi-scholarly journals failed to deliver their promise in a much backward and conservative population, though, as their educational endeavours were brought to an abrupt halt by political turmoil that ended up in the partitioning of the country among the foreign powers.

Key words - popular science journals, history of medicine, 18th century

Streszczenie – W drugiej połowie XVIII wieku ukazywało się w Rzeczypospolitej 19 tytułów czasopism półuczonych, których celem była popularyzacja wiedzy naukowej. Wśród tych tytułów tylko jeden, „Praktyka Lekarska” poświęcony był tematyce medycznej. Analiza treści pozostałych wykazała, że w dziesięciu z nich podejmowano szereg zagadnień związanych z upowszechnianiem osiągnięć medycyny w okresie oświecenia. Były to „Nowe Wiadomości Ekonomiczne i Uczone” (1758-1761), „Wiadomości Literackie” (1760-1763), „Polak Patriot” (1785), „Pamiętnik Polityczny i Historyczny” (1782-1795), „Różne Uwagi Fizyczno-Chemicznego Warszawskiego Towarzystwa” (1769), „Magazyn Warszawski” (1784-1785), „Biblioteka Fizykoko-Ekonomiczna nauczająca i bawiąca” (1788), „Zabawy Obywatelskie” (1792-1793), i „Dziennik Uniwersalny” (1795). Pisma te zawierały głównie przedruk z zagranicznych periodyków, encyklopedii i poradników, przede wszystkim niemieckich i francuskich. Ideą polskich wydawców było wskazanie dobrych wzorców europejskich w zakresie organizacji ochrony zdrowia i kształcenia lekarzy wsparci opieką finansową państwa. Starano się także przekazywać wiedzę w zakresie profilaktyki zdrowotnej, zachęcano do prowadzenia zdrowego trybu życia, polegającego na odpowiednim odżywianiu, unikaniu alkoholu, zażywaniu ruchu na świeżym powietrzu. Zdecydowanie piętnowano obżarstwo, pijastwo, lenistwo i hulączny tryb życia. Wskazywano na zależność zdrowia od zachowania higieny ciała i otoczenia. W czasopismach półuczonych pojawiało się wiele porad dotyczących zasad opieki nad chorym i rekwalifikacji, ochrony kobiet ciężarnych, pielęgnacji niemowląt. Zapoznawano czytelników z normami postępowania w czasie trwania epidemii chorób zakaźnych, wspierano gotowymi receptami na wszelkiego...
rodzaju dolegliwości. Zasadniczą ideą, którą starano się przekazać odbiorcom była dewiza, że zdrowie jest darem od Boga, walczono z mitem, że choroby i epidemie są karami niebios. Czasopisma półuczne nie spełniły swoim zadań w zacofanej i konserwatywnej Polsce, rozbiorzy kraju przerwały próby reform podejmowanych także i w tej dziedzinie.

_Słowa kluczowe_ - czasopisma popularnonaukowe, historia medycyny, XVIII wiek.

Author Affiliations:

1. Pedagogical University of Cracow, Faculty of Philology, Main Library,
2. Pedagogical University of Cracow, Faculty of Philology, Institute of Information Science

Authors’ contributions to the article:

A. The idea and the planning of the study
B. Gathering and listing data
C. The data analysis and interpretation
D. Writing the article
E. Critical review of the article
F. Final approval of the article

Correspondence to:

Ewa Wójcik, PhD, Pedagogical University of Cracow, Faculty of Philology, Main Library, Str., Podchorążych 2 PL-30-084 Kraków, Poland, e-mail: ewa.wojcik@up.krakow.pl

Accepted for publication: March 07, 2018.

The present paper is a part of a research project "Polish popular science journals before 1939", financed by the National Science Centre (Reg. No UMO 2014/15/B/HS2/01071).

I. INTRODUCTION

During the Enlightenment, also dubbed the "age of light and reason", significant changes took place in the domain of medical science across Europe, giving grounds to regard this as some sort of a breakthrough in the art of medical treatment. This worship of knowledge made it possible to reject the old medical beliefs based predominantly on speculations, and to put together a structural framework for modern approach to medical knowledge. Research and various experiments pursued by the scholars like Albrecht Haller, Jean Battista Morgagni, Luigi Galvani, and Antoine Lavosier actually allowed to view medical competence as closely related to the body of knowledge underpinning other domains of science, i.e. physics, chemistry, and mechanics. Numerous theories and approaches were established that aimed to elucidate the most vital physiological and pathological symptoms encountered within a human body. It became apparent that a course of a disease might well be explained through harnessing for this purpose the command of human anatomy and the key principles of physiology. Medical experiments, observations made at the patient's bedside, and anatomical studies gave rise to the brand-new branches of medical knowledge, pathological anatomy, and clinical medicine. It should nevertheless be borne in mind that these indubitable advances in medical science did not really translate into the hands-on medical practice, nor indeed appreciably contributed to overall effectiveness of medical treatment [1].

At the same time, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth there was a total collapse of medical knowledge and virtually no linkage whatsoever with the European advances in this domain. It was not until the reign of King Stanisław August Poniatowski that certain changes for the better could be observed in the approach to public healthcare, licensing of people involved in providing medical assistance, and adoption of the "Hospital Bill" by the Polish parliament [Sejm] in 1775 [2].

Any attempts to have medical education reformed commenced as late as at the time of the National Education Commission, when the medical faculties of the Kraków and Vilnius Universities were given a major reformist shakeup, and began to release certified physicians who boasted medical competence fully commensurate with the latest findings and advances of science in Europe [3].

This simply meant that in the late 18th c. medical care was based mainly on the charitable activity pursued by the country's aristocracy, who were keenly interested in boosting demographic dynamics among their subjects, as well as on clamping down on the spread of infectious diseases within their respective serfdoms. At the time, many foreigners who passed themselves off as doctors of medicine and surgery pursued medical practice across the country, even though often enough they held no formal vocational education in this area to their credit. As at the time nobody was officially put in charge of scrutinizing their medical licences, many of them freely roamed the country offering their services as mere charlatans and ordinary hustlers and conmen.

In general, however, the country's population could rely on the medical services provided by feldshers (medical attendants) and barber-surgeons with a rather limited medical expertise, healers, sheep herdsmen, and herbalists offer-
ing assorted healing "concoctions" for various ailments. The so-called "babkas", i.e. old women herbalists or midwives, well steeped in their trade through dozens of years of hands-on practice and expert knowledge in the healing power of various herbal remedies passed down through generations, were also gladly consulted in medical matters. Regrettfully, this did very little towards appreciable improvement of general health condition within a population, nor indeed in driving down the mortality rate, especially among the new-borns and women in childbirth. Besides, truly atrocious hygienic conditions prevalent among the poor, both urban and rural, appreciably contributed to the spread of epidemics, and were instrumental in decimating the population across the towns and villages [4].

This was still further exacerbated by a widespread conviction, openly upheld by the catholic Church, that epidemics were God's punishment for the sins committed on earth, be that in the individual cases, or on a massive scale. Ignorance and superstition prevalent across the Commonwealth only strengthened the public in this much mistaken belief. Clergy men made clever use of this widespread assertion by way of summoning the faithful to repentance, penance, and generally to amending their sinful ways [5].

The on-going quest for enhancing the state of medical knowledge and general hygiene was also joined by the publishers of semi-scholarly journals, openly modelled on the German "halbge-lehrte" periodicals, which contributed to the rise of popular science culture. In total, nineteen titles of semi-scholarly journals used to be published across the lands of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whereas only one of them – „Praktyka Lekarska” [Medical Practice] was dedicated to medical issues, even though in nine of them the content addressing health and general hygiene issues appeared. This group of publications, intended for the public as "magazines offering useful tips", comprised: „Nowe Wiadomości Ekonomiczne i Uczone” [The New Economic and Scholarly News] (1758-1761), "Wiadomości Literackie" [The Literary Newsletter] (1760-1763), „Polak Patriota” [Being a Polish Patriot] (1785), „Pamiętnik Polityczny i Historyczny” [Political and Historical Diary] (1782-1795), „Różne Uwagi Fizyczno-Chemicznego Warszawskiego Towarzystwa” [Assorted Notes of the Warsaw Physics and Chemistry Society] (1769), „Magazyn Warszawski” [The Warsaw Magazine] ”(1784-1785), „Biblioteka Fizyko-Ekonomiczna nauciąca i bawiąca” [The Physics and Economics Library - offering scholarly knowledge and light entertainment] (1788), „Zabawy Obywatelskie” [Citizens Having Fun] (1792-1793), and „Dziennik Uniwersalny” [The Universal Daily] (1795).
cough). People were also plagued by frequent gastrointestinal conditions, heartburn, intestinal colic, gallstones and urolithiasis (kidney stones). The journal frequently featured the recipes for the female ailments related to childbirth, mastitis and menstrual pain. There were also the formulas for pains of various origin, runny nose, cough, skin burns, frostbite, festering wounds, hiccups, freckles, lichens, and many other infirmities experienced by a human body.

Medical Practice is indeed a most inspiring source for pursuing research into the state of medical knowledge and hygiene in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the late 18th c., as medical knowledge was at the time frequently fused with folk herbalism, and all that liberally laced with popular myths and superstition.

Medical knowledge was also disseminated by many other semi-scholarly journals. Already in the New Economic and Scholarly News, the publication deemed the first Polish popular science magazine, some medical issues had been addressed. His Editor-in-Chief and publisher, one Wawrzyniec Mitzler de Kolof, a German by birth, was a doctor of medicine at the University of Wittenberg. In the foreword to his journal he noted that a human being needed the three essentials for his own happiness, i.e. wealth, health, and wisdom. It comes as no surprise, then, that other publishers assumed the same objective in popularizing medical knowledge and hygiene in their magazines, with a view to limiting the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics, and generally raising the sanitary conditions across the country. Mitzler de Kolof aimed his editorial letter especially at the nobility, who lived out in the countryside, where access to medics was particularly difficult. He therefore imposed upon them the obligation to provide medical care for their own subjects [8].

In his article On the essentials of medical science, Mitzler put forward its definition, i.e. "general awareness of the healthy and harmful agents, aimed at preserving human health and life by as much as possible, as well as at curing the already contracted diseases with the aid of the sound and well-conceived measures" [9]. This article deserves special attention, as its author sets out to debunk all popular myths still harboured within a population. First and foremost, he deems medical science by far the most essential one, as its advances facilitate extension of human life and help avoid premature death. By making a reference to the animal world, he noted that the animals were instinctively capable of addressing and curing their ailments effectively. The Editor saw no reason why people should suffer the purportedly divine will, as making use of the medics had already been expressly referred to in the Holy Bible. He went on to say that God gave people a diverse wealth of plants and precious ores, so they could use them at will for whatever purpose they saw fit.

On this occasion, Mitzler critically appraised the body of professional knowledge commanded by domestic physicians, highlighted the lack of supervision over the pharmacies which were still managed in line with the obsolete regulations, and clearly failed to acknowledge any upgraded information in this regard. He noticed the absence of medical guilds (associations) that in the other countries routinely helped maintain supervision over the pharmacies. He also highlighted the need to have the physicians educated in full conformity with the current European body of medical knowledge, as this was deemed potentially instrumental in appreciably enhancing overall condition of public health.

Mitzler de Kolof, being a medical doctor himself, was well aware that a good medic should boast decent command of chemistry, physics and mechanics, as these domains were tangibly instrumental in establishing the actual causes of the diseases, facilitated diagnosis and treatment, and above all - effective prevention. He divided medical science into the two parts: hygiene and treatment, the former focused on prevention, the latter on the treatment at large. In order to be adequately prepared for practicing the medical profession, one should also command specific skills in anatomy ("exploration of the entire body"), physiology ("on healthy human body"), semiotics ("knowledge of the symptoms (signs) that help diagnose a disease"), and some supplementary knowledge of dietetics ("decent life"), surgery (dressing wounds), and pharmacy ("methods of making medications") [9].

He would compare a human body to the "most perfect machine, which in accordance with all the rules of the construction craft has perfectly been fashioned out". Describing with all due exactitude its components (anatomy) and functions (physiology), he noted that a human being consisted of solid substances (bones and muscles) and the liquid ones (blood), whereas his body was made up of the trunk (spine), and lower and upper limbs [10]. Every part of a human organism is meant to performs specific functions, and so they all must interact with each other, as on the smooth interaction of the solid and liquid substances, a healthy functioning of a human being relies, his life depends on it, his health, illness, and death [11]. Mitzler therefore recommended taking good care of the constituent parts of this machinery (human body) by pursuing a healthy lifestyle, plenty of outdoor activity, following dietary recommendations, and ensuring adequate personal hygiene [12].

Progressive views on broadly construed medical science were also expressed by the publishers of Being a Polish
*Patriot* journal, by way of following in Mitzler's footsteps in this regard. Very much like Mitzler did, good health was deemed by far the most precious thing, and its protection as a personal obligation to God. According to the editorial team, a human body created a great impression with a sheer complexity of its construction, and the very precision of its functioning, as it was a perfect home for the soul. Current status of public health care and its establishment within the Commonwealth was met with stern criticism, while exercising effective supervision over the "patented doctors, barbers and Jews [!] that tended to turn medical treatment into their own amusement" was also called upon.

Expelling of all charlatans of foreign origin from the country, who in an unprincipled way prayed on human misfortune, downright ignorance, and a blind faith in miraculous medications, was postulated. According to the editors, public health care should be subject to supervision by a state authority, within whose prerogatives falls the obligation to ensure public health care and adequate sanitary conditions for the country's population. The construction of hospitals, upkeep of physicians and their education in line with the European standards should fall amongst the royal prerogatives [13]. Medical science was dubbed the art of research, making inferences, and drawing conclusions. This approach stemmed from a dichotomy, i.e. maintaining good health and treating diseases detrimental to it. A physician was expected to boast a decent body of medical knowledge on disease prevention, show some aptitude in studying their causes, be well capable of venturing an accurate diagnosis, and recommend an effective treatment. The Editorial Board acknowledged that a perfect command of the complexities of human body and the principles of its functioning was an adequate foundation for practicing a medical profession [13].

The Editors of *Being a Patriotic Pole* saw as clearly detrimental to the human body such factors as pursuit of an unhealthy lifestyle, obesity, abuse of alcoholic beverages, lack of physical activity, laziness, and general overindulgence in life's pleasures. They launched particularly harsh criticism at men, i.e. the much privileged social stratum, who by virtue of their birth did not engage in any work, being quite happy to pursue a rather leisurely lifestyle, the actual cause of many diseases. The Editors saved their true appreciation for the farmers who, while working mostly outdoors, naturally stood to benefit from plenty of exercise, kept themselves on a simple, healthy diet, and in the Editors' view made up a healthy pillar of society. This editorial may uncannily reverberate with very modern sounding undertones, yet at the same time it is dramatically short of relevance with the country's bleak reality of that period, where the mortality rate in the countryside ran high, which indubitably must have resulted from general unavailability of medical care [14].

*Being a Patriotic Pole* journal also introduced the concepts of a "diet" and "dietetics", which reflected the current state of knowledge on nutrition and its impact on human life. In the article *On one's obligation of preserving one's health, and on the tips for conducting oneself when healthy and during an illness*, the authors endeavoured to explain to their readers the concepts of life, death, and illness. The latter was construed as the "state between life and death", when the body no longer properly fulfilled its functions [15]. The author argued that the Divine Creator imposed onto a man a natural obligation to have his life prolonged and cared for. Hence the Editors' idea of familiarizing their readers with the ways of "behaving when healthy, and when down with an illness". They recommended a diet dependent on a specific type of illness, the patient's age, the season, and a local climate. Dishes light on the stomach, yet at the same time quite nourishing, were recommended most heartily, all sorts of herbal teas were also a big favourite, while abuse of alcohol was strictly banned. This particular write-up began a series of texts expanding on various types of diets, yet firmly guided by Hippocrates' thinking, whereby "it is far better to sin by eating too much than by too little, as nature, fortified by its full strength derived from food may well endure the cause of the disease all by itself, alas, when it becomes short of strength due to the food having been withheld, it languishes [...] in futile idleness" [16].

*The Political and Historical Diary*, one of the most essential journals of the Polish Enlightenment, addressed exclusively the issue of raising the level of professional education for the physicians in the country, whereas the other issues related to the domain of medicine had been transferred by Piotr Świtkowski, its Editor-in-Chief, to the other journals also edited by himself, i.e. *The Warsaw Magazine* and *Citizens Having Fun*. In the former, he actually fleshed out his concepts comprised in the Introduction, focused on describing "the more peculiar diseases and the ways of their treatment, some rare phenomena encountered at childbirth and upon death, prevalent diseases, and contagious diseases between people and beasts, their causes and methods of treatment". First of all, he invited the practicing physicians to become his contributing authors to this section of the journal. Even though not much is known on how successful he was with his call to medical practitioners, several articles on human anatomy and physiology appeared in the journal. Particular attention merits a poetic description of a post-mortem [17]. *The Warsaw Magazine* promoted vaccination against smallpox, the vaccines origi-
nating from China and Turkey, and some interesting medical discoveries were given prominent exposure. Even though by modern standards those 'discoveries' may seem a bit naive, considering the state of medical science at the time, they are still well-worth taking due note [18].

A progressive approach to health problems was also presented by Citizens Having Fun. Extra attention was drawn to an extensive text printed in the three parts, i.e. "The Bible of Human Health", presenting an innovative approach to human health. In a simple form of a dialogue (of the Q & A type) basic information was provided on the disease prevention methods, on safe conduct during the ongoing epidemics, caring for the ones down with illness, providing care in early infancy, application of the key principles of personal hygiene, healthy nutrition, etc. The readers were being talked into believing in the prospect of a long life, provided they adhered to the principles of a healthy and hygienic lifestyle. In the author's view a good command of these principles was as essential in life as a good command of religious instruction, hence the idea to have them disseminated in churches and parish schools [19].

An altogether different approach was embraced by the Vilnius-based Literary Newsletter, which, contrary to its title, did not comprise any literary content whatsoever. In fact, the journal popularised knowledge from various areas of science, including medicine and hygiene. This actually took up a lot of space, while the very weight of the issues addressed reflected rather low public awareness in matters related to health at large, and prevention. Information on how to conduct oneself during epidemics was of particular value. The Editors advised their readers to avoid contact with the infected persons, not to share dishes with them, have all dishes washed up and rinsed off in hot water, while fumigation making use of the smoke from juniper, oak, or pine wood was recommended for the decontamination of the living quarters. Healthy family members were warned against eating suspect meat and leaving their home on an empty stomach [20]. Regrettfully enough, the following "pearls of wisdom" were also encountered on its pages, e.g. "A sense of anger, revenge, or grief, whilst scattering the bile throughout the body, causes an inflammation all over it", or the following recommendation: "The surest remedy against pestilence is leaving one's home early and coming back late". And finally, a warning not to be found in any other periodicals, i.e. "Pestilence, War, and Famine, make up the three most specific types of punishment that God chooses to grind people down"[21].

With regard to general prevention, The Literary Newsletter published a material on the use of drinking water. The author warns against drinking water from an unknown source, which may contain bacteria, i.e. "small worms and micro-organisms that may cause disease or general bloating." Another text highlights that in order to stay in good health one should practice moderation in eating and drinking, especially with regard to alcoholic beverages. These recommendations, sounding universal at any time, are again obscured by the information that "the cause of many diseases is down to excessive consumption of fruits and vegetables in which various worms have their abode, and which inject the stomach with their venom" [22].

The semi-scholarly journals also provided a platform for the assessment of public health care in the Commonwealth. Materials focused on this subject appeared in the above-referenced New Economic and Scholarly News, Political and Historical Diary, as well as in the Assorted Notes of the Warsaw Physics and Chemistry Society. The author, whilst referring to the model of health care in the Western countries, postulated improvement through the appointment of county medics, to be financed from the community's or the state coffers. He also proposed the establishment of the two national institutions, i.e. Collegium Sanitatis and Colle- gium Medicum, for the purpose of aiding the county physicians and maintaining general supervision over the licencing of the "medics" and self-made herbalists offering various therapeutically unproven remedies and cures. These institutions would also be meant to extend their official patronage over the state-owned schools, in which physicians, surgeons, felschers and barber-surgeons would be offered education [23].

The semi-scholarly journals also offered information on the discoveries in the domain of pharmacy, new medications for dog bites were advertised [24], for healing wounds, and miraculous eye potions [25]. There were ready-made recipes for making ointments for frostbite, bruises and rheumatism, medications for intestinal and breast colic, gout, syrups for cough, etc. [25]. Tips were offered for preparing potions out of young pine shoots for scurry and purification of the blood, patches for treating festering wounds, cures for pertussis, toothache, gangrene infested wounds, scabies, etc. Drinking mineral waters was also encouraged in view of its apparent beneficial properties [26]. In general, the exact composition and proportions of ingredients of plant origin, animal fats, spirit, cobwebs, ash, iron filings, grated bricks, etc. were provided. By way of an example, a recipe for a medication for a colic in the side may be quoted here verbatim: "Take as much chicken dung as a pigeon's egg (the white one is better, as it does not defile the milk), put it onto a cloth, tie it all up into a knot, put it into a half-quart of milk, then let the milk boil
five or six times, remove the tied up cloth, squeeze it out well, add some sugar, and then make the ill person drink this seasoned milk, as this would make him come in heavy sweat afterwards”. This medication was also recommended for treating rheumatism, all sorts of colics, and various fevers” [26].

Those recipes were replicated in various journals, which only goes to prove that their editors made use of the same foreign sources. They drew mainly from foreign publications which presented a higher level of public awareness with regard to medical science. A good example is offered by The Physics and Economics Library - offering scholarly knowledge and light entertainment, which in fact is a close translation of the French journal "Bibliothèque Physico-Économique, instructive et amusante". The recipes comprised there were also replicated by The Universal Daily. In the The Physics and Economics Library, published for one year only (1788), one section was dedicated to addressing medical issues - Medications, legal acts, regulations aimed at promoting health of people and animals comprised information on interesting medical cases, diseases and ailments, the country's population had to cope with very much on its own, in view of general unavailability of physicians throughout it. The issues addressed here regarded caring for a woman in childbirth, breastfeeding, treatment of venereal diseases, yellow fever, dressing the gangrene infested wounds, sores and ulcerations. A separate write-up addressed the state of knowledge on the incidence of rabies in people and animals, and the first attempts aimed at preventing and controlling it [27].

III. IN CONCLUSION

Medical issues addressed on the pages of the semi-scholarly journals might be broken down into several thematic groups. The first one dealt with the theoretical issues, medical science at large, and its essentials, new advances in medical research, observation and experimentation, and their results. The second one was focused on the education of medical personnel, whose general unavailability throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was commonly acknowledged, and the establishment of public health care throughout the country, which seemed a pretty far-fetched idea at the time.

The third group of issues touched upon a healthy and hygienic lifestyle, generally disregarded at the time. The remaining content comprised the ready-made recipes and tips for making all sorts of potions, ointments, jellies, balms, healing waters, patches, compresses and wraps, and various medications which might bring relief in pain, fever, or aid a woman in childbirth. The readers were therefore offered panacea for all sorts of ailments. The making of such panacea was based on the one hand on medical science and praxis, backed by a certain command of herbal medicine, while on the other, on the folk medicine based on the centuries-old tradition of symptomatic treatment, although totally devoid of any knowledge of human anatomy. Myths and superstitions were still rife within the population, as was the blind faith in the miraculous powers vested in all sorts of talismans, and – last but not least – an inevitability of God's punishment.

The semi-scholarly journals published in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were truly ahead of their own time, their short-lived character, scarcity of potential readership, and the fact that the content they offered was hardly commensurate with the country's bleak reality, actually made them fail to meet their ambitious objectives of educating the public in terms of general medical awareness and the key principles of hygiene. Their social impact outside of Warsaw was rather negligible, whereas general reluctance of the country's nobility to go along with undermining the existing social order and implanting all kinds of foreign novelties onto the home turf simply meant those journals never actually stood a viable chance of finding a readership.

IV. REFERENCES

[20] [O zdrowym jedzeniu]. Wiadomości Literackie 1760; 26-28; 1-4 [O zarazie]. Wiadomości Literackie 1761; 18: 1-4
[21] [O wodzie]. Wiadomości Literackie 1760; 13: 1-4