

Department of Dosage Form Technology, Riga Stradins University, Riga, Latvia

## Activities of Latvian pharmacists in the Latvian Red Cross organization in exile in Germany (1945–1976)

S. LAUZE\*, B. MAURINA, V. SIDLOVSKA

*Received November 26, 2016, accepted December 29, 2016*

*\*Corresponding author: S. Lauze, 16 Dzirciema Street, Riga, LV-1007, Latvia  
005383@rsu.edu.lv*

*Pharmazie 72:300–303 (2017)*

*doi: 10.1691/ph.2017.6203*

The Latvian Red Cross has performed its assistance mission outside the territory of Latvia for several decades. In the 40-s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the state of Latvia and its people went through one of the most tragic pages of their history. Due to the re-occupation made by the Soviet Union in 1944, many people of Latvia fled to exile and under exile conditions the Latvian societies, parishes and public organizations came into being, including the Latvian Red Cross. It started its activities in the second part of the 40-s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Germany and then representative offices emerged in the U.S.A., Sweden, France, Italy, Denmark, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand. Special attention should be paid to the fact that the activity under exile conditions was of a large scale, well-organized and long-lasting. Substantial work at that time has been done by a number of pharmacists. Among them, the pharmacist and doctor Hugo Skudins (1903–1976) should be emphasized, who organized the purveyance of medication and sending them to Latvians in the occupied Latvia and to the penal camps in Siberia.

### 1. Introduction

The Latvian Red Cross was officially founded on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 – just two days after the proclamation of independence of the state of Latvia. This fact confirms that the activity of the Red Cross Organization in Latvia was necessary because World War I had been ended not long ago and many residents of Latvia needed help. After World War I, the Latvian Red Cross` mission was to provide assistance to war invalids, prisoners of war, refugees and orphans, as well as to work out and develop measures of preventive medicine and hygiene (Latvijas Sarkanā Krusta 10 gadi 1928; Nagobads and Vīksna 2003).

Although, the directions of activity of the Latvian Red Cross marked only in the first period of independence of Latvia (1918–1940), the Red Cross Organization`s ideas and efforts had been known to residents of Latvia before that time. As Latvia, for many decades, had already been a member of the Russian Empire, everything there took place as throughout Russia. Following the events in Europe, in May 1867, the Russian Emperor Alexander II (1818–1881) approved the Rules of the Society of Custody of the Wounded and Sick Soldiers. In 1879, the Russian Society of Custody of the Wounded and Sick Soldiers was renamed into the Russian Red Cross Society. Then the Russian Red Cross Organizations were formed in all the provinces of the empire (Nagobads and Vīksna 2003; Istorija Russkogo Krasnogo Kresta (1854–2002)).

### 2. The Latvian Red Cross (1918–1945)

The founder and first chief of the Latvian Red Cross was the military doctor, surgeon Janis Jankovskis (1876–1925). In 1910, Jankovskis defended a thesis on the shot and stab injuries of abdominal organs and acquired a doctor`s degree of medicine at Tartu University. In 1915, he formed an infirmary of the joint infantry battalion, which was based on a military infirmary of the Latvian Department of the Jelgava Red Cross (Vīksna 1990).

An active part in the activity of the Latvian Red Cross Organization was taken by the Latvian pharmacist Davis Blumenthal (1871–1937). He had accumulated huge experience acting in the Russian Red Cross Organizations during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and World War I (1914–1918). In 1920, Davis

Blumenthal returned to Latvia and got involved in activities of the Latvian Red Cross. He became the first executive director of an Office of the Principal Board of the Latvian Red Cross, as well as an editor of the Red Cross` magazine. His vast experience served the organization of work of the Latvian Red Cross (Lettgallijas ģenerālsapulce 1996).

On 24 March 1922, the Constitutional Assembly of Latvia adopted the Law on the Accession of Latvia to the Hague Convention and the Geneva Convention. On 10 January 1923, the Latvian Red Cross was admitted to the league of the International Red Cross` societies as the 51<sup>st</sup> member of the represented Member States. The aims and objectives of the Latvian Red Cross met all requirements set out by the International Red Cross Committee. Upon expanding its activities, the Latvian Red Cross formed and managed a well-organized network of hospitals, sanatoria, dispensaries, pharmacies and health care points. At Janis Jankovskis` initiative, in 1921, a medical school was opened under the auspices of the Latvian Red Cross, which was intended to prepare highly qualified nurses (Šilde).

The Latvian Red Cross functioned until June 17, 1940 when its activities were interrupted by the Soviet occupation. A year later, the Soviet occupation was followed by the Nazi German occupation. In 1941, during the Soviet occupation, there were mass deportations of Latvian residents, so the idea was born to establish special aid organizations that would provide support to families of deported persons. In summer 1941, for a short period of time, the Latvian Red Cross restored its activity. That time, the first lists of deported persons` names were made and sent to the International Red Cross` Committee in Geneva, but upon strengthening of the German civil power in the territory of Latvia, the Latvian Red Cross` activity was stopped again. Humanitarian work ideas, however, continued to find supporters and led to the establishment of a new aid organization called “People Assistance”. It included in its regulations an idea of assistance to the deported persons` relatives. The Latvian public figure and politician Spricis Paegle (1876–1962) participated in the development of the regulations, and they were approved by the German General Commissar in Riga on 31 October 1941. “People Assistance” united under its auspices six organizations of similar profile, including the Latvian Red Cross (Šilde). Soon the new aid organization got wide popu-

larity in society. In 1942, 40,473 aid prayers were registered in the organizations of "People Assistance", mainly those whose relatives were deported from the territory of Latvia, but also there was no shortage of victims of war events. In 1943, "People Assistance" has about 600 sub-organizations and its structure was divided into districts and regions covering the entire territory of Latvia. Aid was granted in different ways, both as a cash benefit and property values such as food, clothes, shoes, furniture and firewood. "People Assistance" operated until 1945, as then the territory of Latvia was incorporated into the USSR (Nagobads and Viksna 2003; Šilde).

### 3. The Latvian Red Cross under exile conditions in Germany

In 1944, towards the USSR's re-occupation, a large part of residents of Latvia fled, including a part of members of the Organization "People Assistance". The Latvian Red Cross restored its activity in 1945 under exile conditions in Germany and maintained its legitimacy after 1945. Almost at the same time two administrations of the Latvian Red Cross were formed in Lübeck, an area occupied by the British, and the other administration in Heidenheim, an area occupied by the Americans. In autumn 1945, the administration from Heidenheim moved to Esslingen. A little later, the Principal Board of the Latvian Red Cross was formed in Detmold chaired by Spricis Paegle. In 1945, in Detmold, the first meeting of the restored Latvian Red Cross was held, which showed that 15 out of 30 members of the Principal Board of the Latvian Red Cross were in exile and this ensured smooth functioning of the organization outside the territory of Latvia (Šilde).

In 1946, a head of the administration of the Latvian Red Cross in Esslingen, the famous Latvian diplomat and politician Roberts Liepins (1890–1978) reported to the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva that the Latvian Red Cross had started functioning under exile conditions. August 29, 1946, the Swiss lawyer, politician and diplomat, president of the International Red Cross Committee from 1928 until 1944, Max Huber (1874–1960), gave formal notice, in which he stated that the Latvian Red Cross could function outside the territory of Latvia, only a consent should be received from the Red Cross of those country where the Latvian Red Cross was planning to carry out its activities. The Latvian Red Cross was received the consent for carrying out its activities from the West German Red Cross in 1951, when the joint Red Cross under the name of the German Red Cross (*Deutsches Rotes Kreuz*) had been formed (Šilde).

Immediately after the renewal of the activity of the Latvian Red Cross, its activists started to identify Latvian soldiers taken into hostage and did everything it could to relieve them. The situation was complicated by the fact that the Latvian soldiers were in different camps, not only in Germany, but also in France, Belgium, Italy, Egypt, Algeria and elsewhere. An information bureau with a filing system was formed, which could be used by the Latvian refugees for search of the missed family members. The Latvian Red Cross undertook the identification of refugees, orphans and blinds, as well as provided assistance to war invalids and families with many children in exile. The Latvian Red Cross was also engaged in recording the deported Latvians and collecting information about them. Most data on deported persons were received by the Latvian Red Cross in 1955, when the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967) managed to achieve in Moscow the release of 9600 German soldiers from captivity. A representative of the Latvian Red Cross spent four months in Friedland near Göttingen, in order to collect information in the camp of released German soldiers located there about the Latvians in penal camps in Russia. In general, he managed to get about 600 testimonies as well as to find out the location of deported persons and hundreds of personal names. Since 1954, the Latvian Red Cross has got information on those Soviet penal camps, where Latvians were, also from the Documentation Exchange of the German Red Cross in München (Šilde; Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts Vācijā).

### 4. Activities of pharmacists in the Latvian Red Cross in exile

Direct tasks of the Latvian Red Cross included medical care and purveyance of medicines. The main warehouse of purveyance of medicines was originally located in Esslingen, but in 1953, it moved to Stuttgart (Latvian State Archive 1953). In addition, sizeable stocks of medicines, starting by 1954, were located in the warehouse of dispensary of the Latvian Red Cross in Ulm by the river Danube (Latvian State Archive 1954). Parcels of medicines were received not only by Latvians who were in the territory of West Germany, but also residents of Latvia. As soon as the first accurate information on deported persons and addresses were obtained, the Latvian Red Cross began to send food and medicines to Siberia. The most intensive medication shipments were made to Latvia and Siberia during the period from 1954 until 1960. Then amendments in legislation of the Soviet Union were made, which encumbered the shipment of medicaments, and after 1960, this opportunity was denied at all (Šilde).

Important positions in the Latvian Red Cross were taken also by a number of Latvian pharmacists, who took care of the purveyance of medicines, inspection of their quality and shipment to destinations. One of them was Latvian pharmacist Voldemars Cerbulis (1891–1985). From 1916 to 1918, Cerbulis studied pharmacy at Tartu University and received a pharmacist's diploma. Until 1944, Cerbulis was the owner of the Brivibas drugstore in Riga. In 1944, Cerbulis fled and came to Germany. Until his departure to the U.S.A he was involved in activities of the Latvian Red Cross under exile conditions. He became a senior pharmacist of the Schleswig Department of the Latvian Red Cross. In 1950, Cerbulis went to New York, where he worked as a pharmacist-analyst (Šaurums 1932; Belevičs 2000).

Similarly, for a short period, Karlis Riekstins (1890–1952), by education a pharmacist and doctor, worked in the Latvian Red Cross Organization in exile. He studied pharmacy at Moscow University and he acquired a pharmacist's degree in 1918. He acquired a Doctor's diploma 1929 from the University of Latvia. From 1929 to 1944, Riekstins was the owner of a drugstore in the regional town Saldus. In autumn 1944, he went into exile, came to Austria first, but moved to West Germany later, where he got involved in the Latvian Red Cross Organization. He was a representative of the Latvian Red Cross in the area occupied by the French. In 1950, Riekstins emigrated to the U.S.A. and lived in Des Moines, the State of Iowa (Belevičs 2001; Laiks, 1952).

One of the most active organizers of assistance in exile years was a head of the Medical Care Division of the Latvian Red Cross Hugo Skudins (1903–1976), by education a pharmacist and doctor. He was son of a pharmacist and was born in Riga August 21, 1903. In 1929, Skudins began pharmaceutical studies at the University of Latvia and acquired a Master's degree in pharmacy. In 1935, he began to study medicine and acquired a doctor's diploma in 1943. In 1944, Skudins was called into the German army, where he was a military doctor. December 6, the same year, Skudins was wounded and after recovery he was a doctor in a military hospital in Treptow, nowadays called Trzebiatów in Poland. In 1945, Skudins came to Germany, where he worked as a doctor and pharmacist in the Bad Oldesloe captive's camp near Hamburg. Later he was released from work in the camp and went to Esslingen, where, in 1951, he started to work in the Latvian Red Cross Organization. In 1954, Skudins took the leadership of the Medical Care Division of the Latvian Red Cross in the German city of Ulm. He carried out the care of patients at the Ulm dispensary as a doctor and the purveyance of medicaments and their shipment to patients as a pharmacist. Under his leadership, the Ulm dispensary from a simple point of assistance was grown into a major point of the purveyance and shipment of medicines of the Latvian Red Cross. He was one of the few Latvian pharmacists in exile, who did not emigrate to the U.S.A. in 1950. Hugo Skudins selflessly worked in the Latvian Red Cross Organization until 15 September 1976, when he died due to a heart attack (Londonas Avīze, 1960; Laiks 1976; Lauze et al. 2015).

Already from 1947, strong support to the Latvian Red Cross in the purveyance of medicaments was given by the Swiss Red Cross and the Norwegian Red Cross. Besides that, contacts established with German pharmaceutical firms during the time of independence of Latvia were useful. Later, cooperation with the German Red Cross also strengthened. The Norwegian Red Cross donated almost every year in large quantities – up to 1000 kilograms of fish oil capsules, which were handed out mainly to tuberculosis patients and children (Šilde). During Skudins' time, good cooperation developed directly with the Swiss Red Cross that helped each year by donating medicaments. For example, in 1955, it donated to the Latvian Red Cross large quantities of medications, including penicillin and streptomycin preparations urgently needed, a lot of different galenical preparations and artificial vitamins (Latvian State Archive 1955).

Gradually, more and more residents of Latvia got informed about the opportunities to get assistance from the Latvian Red Cross in exile, and therefore letters with requests for medication were sent to Germany, especially between 1956 and 1958, because in those years a lot of deported Latvian residents returned home from exile sites. In the Soviet Union, where Latvia was incorporated after World War II, the assortment and availability of medicaments were limited, so the Latvian Red Cross' shipments saved many lives or restored health. Most of the letters contained a description of symptoms needing medical treatment. Rarely a prescription issued by a doctor with a specific medication name was added to letters. The letters first came to Stuttgart, where the Principal Office of the Latvian Red Cross examined the requests for medication. Then the information was transferred to pharmacist Hugo Skudins in Ulm (Lauze et al. 2015; Latvian State Archive 1957). Thanks to Skudins' professionalism and experience, he determined diagnoses and made a proper shipment of medicaments on the basis of descriptions of disease symptoms. Most of the letters contained requests for medicaments for the treatment of inflammation, heart diseases, respiratory diseases, including tuberculosis. Besides that, nerve inflammation, tiredness and mental illnesses were mentioned very often, as a large part of prayers for medication from persons who recently had returned from the deportation camps (Latvian State Archive 1957).

The time between 1956 and 1959 was particularly busy to the pharmacist Hugo Skudins, because the letters with requests for medication came in unprecedented quantities. In 1957, together with the annual assistance of the Swiss and Norwegian Red Crosses in the purveyance of medicaments the Latvian Red Cross received donations of medicines from the company *Sandoz* and drugs from the Italian Red Cross to combat tuberculosis. Increasing volumes of the medication shipment, at the end of 1957, the medication stocks fell sharply. That led to searching for other ways to replenish the medical supplies by H. Skudins. In this case, the necessary medicines were purchased for cash from local pharmacies that sold medicines to H. Skudins as a doctor of the Latvian Red Cross with 20% discount. Discussing the opportunities of purchase of medicaments with the German Red Cross, it became clear that it also gave him the same discount for the purchase of medicaments. In this context, at the end of 1957, the Latvian Red Cross received donations of medicaments from the German Red Cross and 14 packages of drugs from the Baltic German doctor Harry Marnitz (1894–1984) in Bremen (Latvian State Archive 1957).

As a result, from April 1, 1956 to February 28, 1958, in total 1,450 packages of medicaments with 20,000 units of medication were sent. The largest amount, 1,325 packages of medication with 18,715 units was sent to the occupied Latvia. In total, 98 packages with 1,005 units of medication were sent to Siberia. The smallest amount of medicines was sent to Latvian refugees in West Germany – 27 packages with 280 units of medication (Šilde) (Table 1).

In 1958, the Latvian Red Cross received rather significant donations both in terms of money and medication. This strong support came from Latvians living in the US. Medication shipments to Latvia were mostly supported by money from the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran congregations in the US and the Latvian Association of America in Washington. Similarly, the Latvian Red Cross

**Table 1: Number of medications sent by Latvian Red Cross organization April 1956 – February 1958**

Destination	Period of time	
	April 1, 1956 – February 28, 1958	
	Number of packages	Units of medications
Latvia	1 325	18 715
Siberia	98	1 005
West Germany	27	280
Total	1 450	20 000

continued to receive medication from the Swiss Red Cross in Bern, the Württemberg department of the German Red Cross in Stuttgart. Repeated shipments came from the doctor Harry Marnitz in Bremen as well. All the years of functioning, the Latvian Red Cross mostly lacked the expensive and widely sought penicillin and streptomycin preparations, but in 1958, with the help of the theologian, Professor Karlis Kundzins (1883–1967) and the lawyer Rozalija Purgale (1904–1984) the problem was solved. The Latvian Red Cross received these drugs in large quantities from pharmaceutical companies of the US, which were ready to also support the Latvian Red Cross, when they found out that it supplied Latvians in the occupied Latvia and in exile in Siberia with medicine. This request was responded by such pharmaceutical companies of the US as *Upjohn Company*, donating multivitamins and streptomycin, and *Pfizer Corporation*, sending to the Latvian Red Cross 86 boxes of medicines, weighing 2 tons. They contained penicillin and streptomycin, as well as 500 packages with valuable capsules of anti-tuberculosis preparation cycloserine (Latvian State Archive 1958). During the period from March 1, 1958 until April 30, 1959, 1,048 bundles of medicaments with 13,321 units of medication were sent to Latvia and the Soviet deportation sites. 922 packages with 12,420 units of medication were sent to Latvia, 101 packages with 598 units of medication were sent to Siberia, and 25 packages with 303 units of medication were sent to West Germany. Latvians living in West Germany, especially those who were in the vicinity of Stuttgart had the opportunity to get medicaments from the Latvian Red Cross' warehouse directly. Therefore, the amount of medicaments actually handed out to Latvians living in West Germany was higher in all the reported years (Latvian State Archive 1958) (Table 2).

**Table 2: Number of medications sent by Latvian Red Cross organization March 1958 – April 1959**

Destination	Period of time	
	March 1, 1958 – April 30, 1959	
	Number of packages	Units of medications
Latvia	922	12 420
Siberia	101	598
West Germany	25	303
Total	1 048	13 321

Medicaments were sent in packages that did not exceed the weight of 500 grams. The packages of medicaments usually travelled to Latvia from 10 to 21 days, formed as registered parcels or samples of goods. Rarely the bundles were delivered by air mail. In the Soviet territory such parcels were usually checked extending the travel time of package. There were cases when the Latvian Red Cross received information on damage to a bundle. Often they were opened for inspection purposes, and sometimes a part of medication of the package was lost. In such cases, the lost medicaments were sent repeatedly. Pharmacist H. Skudins' task was to form a parcel according to postal regulations of the Soviet Union. He carefully registered each shipment to draw up annual reports on his activities. Each shipment was presented a consignment note

where the beneficiary's name, address, weight of package and list of sent medicaments were specified (Latvian State Archive 1957).

## 5. Conclusions

The number of Latvian pharmacists, who were involved in the activities of the Latvian Red Cross in exile, was not great. The pharmacist and doctor Hugo Skudins should be noted as the most significant in its activities. The importance and need of his work are confirmed by a huge number of gratitude letters found in the State Archives of Latvia. Most of the letters are addressed directly to Hugo Skudins with gratitude for the medicines and successful recovery. His name was known and respected in Latvia. Shipments made by the Latvian Red Cross to the occupied Latvia and exile sites in Siberia in those years returned health to many people and saved lives.

Conflicts of interest: None declared

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