"A History of Russian and Soviet Medical Ethics"

The ideas of zemskaya medicine, such as universal access to health care and the condemnation of private practice, were put into practice under the Soviet regime (1917-1991). When Bolsheviks seized power, the communal foundations of Russian life (the so-called sobornost' or solidarity) became apparent. The primacy of the kollektiv (or group) over an individual can be seen not only in involuntary organization of kolkhozy (collective farms that replaced individually owned farms) but also in attempts to eliminate confidentiality. A paternalistic model of the doctor-patient relationship in Soviet medicine is evident in the denial of obligation to inform patients about unfavorable diagnoses and prognoses, especially in oncology. Even the right of medical ethics itself to exist was challenged, as reflected in the use of the term "deontology" instead of "medical ethics".

The talk will provide an outline of major issues in medical ethics in Russian/Soviet medicine (abortions, euthanasia, organ transplantation, abuse of psychiatry etc.) in a historical context.