

The Minister of Public Health was not in any danger; it was only a test call, the purpose of which was to find out how efficiently and how well the city's ambulance service operated.

To me, this episode seemed to be symbolic to some extent. Certainly, emergency assistance is a necessity nowadays for the ambulance service of the North, which is often incapable of easing a patient's lot. This is due to the fact that in Yakutia (as in other areas), for example, almost 80 per cent of ambulance calls are answered by doctors' assistants and only three per cent by special teams - whose qualifications, in any case, often leave much to be desired. To be precise, this was the reason that, for example, in Magadan Oblast and in Yakutia more than one third of all patients with intestinal obstructions and almost half of those with a perforated ulcer are brought to hospital on the second day (and perhaps even later) after the onset of the complaint. Emergency ambulance hospitals, which could not only become centers for extraneous medical intervention but could also provide organizational and regular leadership for the ambulance service, have still not been set up in these districts. But here is the paradox. In spite of the helplessness of the ambulance service, the number of appeals to doctors by dialing "03" is growing at an uncontrolled rate. This has become especially noticeable during the past two years. As an example, over a one-year period almost every other inhabitant of Krasnoyarsk Kray was obliged to call for the services of an ambulance. And the situation is the same in other oblasts. This once again supports the finding that a very serious rhythmic disturbance is to be observed in the functioning of the polyclinics, and of the public health units, and of the hospitals. When people fail to receive any medical help where they live or where they work, they have gotten in the habit of dialing "03". Why do so many links in the public health service chain malfunction?