The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Doctor Fears Reprisals After Appeal

By Alexandra Odynova

December 19, 2010



Putin visiting an Ivanovo hospital on Nov. 9. A doctor says much of what Putin saw was staged for his benefit. **Alexei Nikolsky**

An Ivanovo doctor fears being fired or beaten after he told Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on a call-in show last week that a local hospital had faked a display for a visit by Putin, installing borrowed equipment, dressing up staff as patients and forcing nurses to lie about their salaries.

The doctor, Ivan Khrenov, 24, was selected out of thousands of Russians to address Putin during his annual call-in show Thursday. Speaking as an anonymous caller, Khrenov told Putin that the administration of an Ivanovo hospital had created a Potemkin village for his visit on Nov. 9.

He said sick patients were sent home, replaced by clinic personnel surrounded by gleaming equipment borrowed from other hospitals, and nurses had to tell Putin that their monthly salaries had been raised to 12,000 rubles ($390), when in fact they get about 5,000 rubles ($165).

Putin replied that Khrenov's comments were “strange” but promised that a special commission from the Health and Social Development Ministry would scrutinize how the hospital spent the 130 million rubles ($4.2 million) that it received from the federal government this year.

When the studio audience broke into applause, Putin asked, "What are you cheering at? The art of the [hospital] managers or the doctor's bravery?"

Ivanovo Governor Mikhail Men, reappointed by the Kremlin to a new five-year term in October, voiced skepticism about Khrenov's allegations Friday but promised to examine them. He also posted four photos via his Twitter account of new equipment that he said belonged to the hospital.

The region's top health official, Irina Atroshenko, released a statement late Thursday describing Khrenov as "insane" and denying that he had any connection to the hospital.

“Maybe he was driven by a desire to become famous,” Atroshenko said.

She met with Khrenov on Friday to ask about his complaint and offer assurances that he would not be fired, news reports said.

But Khrenov said he was worried about what might happen to him next.

"I will not be surprised if somebody meets me in a dark alley or I am forced to resign 'voluntarily,'" Khrenov said in a interview with RIA-Novosti. “In that case, I won't be able to find a medical job in Ivanovo."

Khrenov said a troubled conscious prompted him to complain to Putin. He said he first wrote a letter detailing his concerns about a coverup to Putin, and a Rossia television representative subsequently contacted him and asked him to voice them during the call-in show.

Questions posed to Putin during the show are always pre-screened.

Khrenov said a television technician checked his office telephone several days before he used it to speak with Putin.

Khrenov said he was informed about a coverup by former classmates who work at the hospital and from his patients.

Ivanovo region prosecutors said in a statement Friday that a check had been opened into Khrenov's statement.

Khrenov's mother, Olga, said in an interview with Russian News Service that her son was summoned to the prosecutor's office on Friday.

Khrenov's complaint became one of the most-discussed issues in the Russian blogosphere by Friday, with thousands of bloggers speaking in his support.

A blogger nicknamed Uni_corn wrote on LiveJournal that an unidentified woman working in the hospital confirmed the information voiced by Khrenov.

The topic also heated up Ivanovo's online forums. An Internet user nicknamed Tohyc, whose mother works at a hospital department visited by Putin in November, wrote that all nurses over the age of 30 took off their white work gowns to pose as patients and "say they were pleased with the staff."

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/12/19/doctor-fears-reprisals-after-appeal-a3835