

In memory of Professor Stanisław Nęcek

Professor Stanisław Nęcek, an anaesthesiologist, an honorary member of the Polish Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy, and a member of the editorial board of *Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy*, died on 28 January, 2014.

Like many other Poles of his generation, he spent most of his professional life outside Poland, yet he never lost contact with Polish anaesthesiology or his many friends working in our country.

Prof Nęcek was born in Bielsko-Biała in 1935. He spent the period of World War II in Silesia; from 1952, when he started his medical studies, he was closely associated with Kraków. He completed his studies in 1958 and started working as an assistant at the Surgical Ward of the Stefan Żeromski Hospital in Nowa Huta where he specialised in surgery (first-degree specialism). From the very beginning, his interests were also focused on anaesthesiology. He made contact with the Department of Anaesthesiology in Kraków headed by the then associate professor Marek Sych, where he underwent his initial training and decided to devote himself to this new specialisation. He supplemented his training in the Krakow centre with 3-month courses organised in Warsaw under the direction of Dr Mieczysław Justyna. After obtaining his first-degree specialism in anaesthesiology, he conducted anaesthetic procedures in the 1,000-bed hospital in Nowa Huta. Thanks to his contacts with the Krakow centre and Marek Sych, he completed the one-year training in Massachusetts General Hospital as an exchange visitor, receiving an ECFMG Certificate. As he stressed many times, the Harvard training was extremely intensive and included anaesthesias for all kinds of surgical procedures as well as a course in the then unique 'Respiratory Care' given by Henning Pontoppidan and Henrik Bendixen, later doctor honoris causa of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. After completing his training in Boston, Dr Nęcek went to Austria where he decided not to return to Poland; he took up work in Allg. Krankenhaus in Linz. This decision was not an easy one, especially given that his wife, a doctor of medicine and dentistry, was still in Poland and had problems obtaining a passport that would enable her



to join her husband. After many failed official attempts, he decided to bring his wife in illegally through Yugoslavia. They both successfully applied for Geneva Convention passports, which however did not allow for their permanent stay in Austria; therefore, they temporarily left for the United States to come back one year later to Austria and start working in the same hospital Dr Nęcek had worked in while waiting for his wife. That was at the beginning of the arduous period, which not all those emigrating from Poland can consider a professional success. The period was tough, as Prof Nęcek

recollected years later. He had his diplomas and specialism certificates officially recognised, received Austrian citizenship and finally, thanks to intensive work and further courses in cardiac anaesthesia under the direction of its pioneers, i.e. Laver, Halowell and Lowenstein, achieved his professional goals.

Over time, Stanisław Nęcek became a highly respected anaesthesiologist in Austria. The hospital he worked in had 1,000 beds and a full range of specialist departments, including the first separate Department of Anaesthesiology, created in 1954 and headed by Prof Hans Bergman. Based on his doctoral thesis regarding measurements of water in the lungs, Prof Nęcek fitted in well. Over the years, his contribution to the development of cardiac anaesthesia and intensive therapy became increasingly noticeable. In 1987, when Prof Bergman retired, Prof Nęcek was appointed head of the Department (Abteilung für Anaesthesiologie und Intensivmedizin), which was a real sensation. A physician from a distant country in Eastern Europe had been given the leadership of the Department previously headed by Prof Bergman, such an important figure in anaesthesiology. The Department, housing 20 intensive care beds, had 45 staff, two resuscitation ambulances, and one helicopter for transporting the most severely ill patients.

Stanisław Nęcek started to help Polish anaesthesiologists coming to Austria to find gainful employment and learn the techniques of anaesthesia as well as the work organisation system employed there based on the most up-to-date technical achievements.

The changes in Poland and the end of martial law encouraged Prof Nęcek to re-establish close contact with the country, particularly with the centres in Kraków, Poznań and Wrocław. Thanks to his involvement, some Austrian professors, e.g. Mayrhofer, Steinbereithner, Bergmann, started to co-operate closely with anaesthesiologists in Poland, and were later honoured with the title of doctor honoris causa at the universities of Kraków, Poznań and Lublin.

Subsequently, Prof Nęcek was actively involved in the congresses of the Polish Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy organised in Poland and in postgraduate training; he became a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy*. His knowledge and experience were used in reviewing papers submitted for publication.

The farewell speech delivered at his funeral on behalf of the Board of the Polish Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy and the Editorial Board of the journal included the following words: "Many of us remember his excellent lectures devoted, among other things, to proper personnel management, use of its potential and abilities in difficult, everyday work in the operating theatre and in intensive care of the most severely ill patients. Many of us still use this knowledge".

After retiring, the Professor devoted much time to the development of his wonderful house near Linz, which became his next passion. This beautiful house in an old water mill, furnished with the utmost taste, was of a quality al-

most befitting a museum. On numerous occasions, Mr. and Mrs. Necek had friends, especially anaesthesiologists from Poland, staying in their house. Everyone was welcomed there and given gifts, including some valuable books from the huge library of Prof Nęcek. His collection of books included titles of specialist literature and many others. This library best reflected his wide range of interests. You could spend hours hearing about interesting things and the people he had met in his life. He was an excellent storyteller; his conversations were full of anecdotes masterfully told.

The way Prof Nęcek was perceived by the community of the charming town near which he lived is best reflected in the funeral organised by the citizens and authorities of Linz, where he was an honorary citizen. The funeral drew crowds of people. On behalf of the Main Board of our Society, of which he was an honorary member, and the editorial board of the journal, Doctor Wojciech Groń, his friend and an anaesthesiologist from Kraków, read the farewell letter in Polish and German.

The death of Professor Necek is not only a loss for his family and friends. Anaesthesiology has lost a person of unusual strength of character who was devoted to Polish anaesthesiology, an excellent educator who shared his knowledge and experiences with others, someone sensitive to human suffering, and an outstanding ambassador for Poland.

He will remain in our memory forever.

Witold Jurczyk
Janina Suchorzewska