

NON OMNIS MORIAR

IN MEMORIAM OF PROFESSOR MARIA KOBUSZEWSKA-FARYNA (1920-2009)

Maria Kobuszevska was born in Warsaw on January 5, 1920. Her father Edward was a clerk in the National Savings Bank, while up till Poland's liberation in 1918, her mother Alina was a homemaker and raised their three children (daughters Maria and Hanna and son Jan). Maria's happy childhood and adolescence were spent in the Warsaw district of Bródno, in the Leonia Rudzka School for Girls, where she graduated in 1937. A careful reader of a book written by Maria's sister Hanna (Hanna Zborowska née Kobuszevska: "Humour in the genes". Kowalska/Stiasny, 2002) may get a glimpse of and understand the atmosphere of those days and learn of the extremely rich life of the family in which Maria Kobuszevska grew up and which shaped her personality. The extremely strong family ties were for her the key to her future life.

After graduation, Maria enrolled in Warsaw University as a student at the Faculty of Law, yet after one year, she resigned and became a medical student of the same university. Unfortunately, World War II broke out, the university was closed down and the horror of Nazi occupation began. Everybody, especially young people, had to work somewhere – anywhere – to be issued the *ausweis*, a document which supposedly protected its bearer from detention and arrest. Maria Kobuszevska started to work in a pharmacy in Marszałkowska Street, where she held the lowest possible position of an unskilled pharmacy technician involved in packaging portions of pharmaceuticals. In 1941, she resumed her studies, interrupted by the war, enrolling in the "Vocational School for Support Sanitary Personnel" owned by J. Zaorski; the school was in reality the underground Faculty of Medicine of Warsaw University. But the crucial moment in her life was most likely her being arrested together with other participants of courses organized by J. Zaorski in March 1943 and her several-week long imprisonment in Pawiak Prison. She emerged afterwards very much changed; a cheerful young girl was replaced by a mature woman with well-established views. Quoting her sister Hanna, Maria "rested in an active way and the maxim coined by Rychłowski (former head of the Leonia Rudzka School) 'in work you will find rest for your spirit'" suited her perfectly well. Having been released from prison, Maria again assumed her interrupted studies, this time attending clandestine classes organized by Warsaw University in the Wolski Hospital. In spring of 1944, she was mobilized and joined as a volunteer the service in Armia Krajowa (AK



– Polish Underground Army); as a medical student, she was enlisted to perform the duties of a physician in health service outposts prepared by the army should the Warsaw Uprising break out. During the Uprising, she was issued an AK identity card, under the pseudonym "Dr Marysia" (Dr Mary), and she was sent to a first-aid station, where she worked dressing wounds until the day of the Warsaw Uprising's capitulation.

After the Uprising, Maria and her family were deported to the village of Krzciecice near Jędrzejów. There, faithful to Rychłowski's maxim, she started working as a physician serving the health-related needs of the inhabitants of Krzciecice and neighbouring villages; in view of the lack of transport services and medications, it was a task both extraordinarily difficult and requiring complete involvement and devotion. Nevertheless, immediately after Warsaw's liberation, she returned to the capital city, where she completed her studies at Warsaw University.

The years 1946-1960

In 1946, Maria Kobuszevska began the second stage of her life – she received her diploma and was licensed to practise medicine. She had no problems with choosing her specialty: while attending J. Zaorski's school, she had become convinced that pathological anatomy was the "mother of all sciences" and as early as on April 1, 1946, she became employed as a senior assistant supervised by Professor Ludwik Paszkiewicz, MD at the Department of Pathological Anatomy of Warsaw University. In the same year, she commenced her second employment as a senior assistant at the Warsaw Chair of Pathological Anatomy of the Dental Academy based in the former Municipal Hospital No. 4 (presently the Praski Hospital); her supervisor was Professor Janina Dąbrowska, MD.

These two splendid and eminent personages markedly influenced the fate and professional career of Maria Kobuszevska. She became completely involved in helping Professor Paszkiewicz organize and carry out classes in the Department of Pathological Anatomy. Those were the times of raising Warsaw from the ruins and clearing the debris, marked by shortages of everything, and especially medical equipment. Those were also the times of the communists entrenching themselves in Poland and the ensuing dark period of communism; this was a time for

making knowledgeable choices. From the perspective of time, it seems that it was Professor Paszkiewicz who took on the burden of political struggle, leaving professional matters to his assistants as the main subject of their interest. This is why the Professor attracted so many young physicians, who were to become future eminent professors themselves, forming the circle called “the school of Paszkiewicz”:



In the years 1948-1949, Maria Kobuszewska also worked as a sports medicine physician and a school doctor, and then headed an outpatient clinic for schoolchildren. In 1949, she married Tadeusz Faryna, who in the future was to become one of the most talented paediatric surgeons. In the same year, she started preparing her doctoral dissertation entitled “Ectopic chorionepitheliomas in females”. She was granted a doctoral degree in medicine in April 1951; subsequently, she was appointed an assistant professor in the Department of Pathological Anatomy and additionally she became head of histopathology research in the histology laboratory of the Department. In May 1953, she passed her examination and became qualified as a second (highest) degree specialist in pathological anatomy. On December 20, 1954, the Central Qualification Committee for Research Personnel appointed Maria Kobuszewska-Faryna Associate Professor at the Chair of Pathological Anatomy, Medical Academy in Warsaw.

In addition to carrying out her professional duties, she was an active member of numerous commissions appointed by the Medical Academy, (enrolment committees for new students, a job assignment committee for graduates, etc.).

The years 1961-2000

On April 1, 1961, the Ministry of Health appointed Associate Professor Maria Kobuszewska-Faryna Chair of Pathological Anatomy at the Institute of Postgraduate Education of the Medical Academy in Warsaw, later renamed the Centre for Postgraduate Training. The date opened yet another stage in her life, best characterized by the prophetic entry made by Professor Ludwik Paszkiewicz in the Department’s guest book

“Quod bonum, felix, faustumque sit” (May it be good, fortunate and prosperous). And so it was. Postgraduate education became her passion, the work of her life. Her place of employment was the Bielański Hospital, completed in 1960, which soon gained the reputation of a highest-level academic institution and was often referred to as the “Bielański Academy”. The Department of Pathological Anatomy, designed by Professor Janina Dąbrowska, was a very modern facility considering the times. In the nineteen sixties, the foremost and most pressing task was educating the young cadre of pathomorphologists – there were fewer than 20 of them after World War II. This is why, ever since the Department first opened its doors, much effort was directed into developing various forms of postgraduate training courses, lasting anywhere between seven days and three months. Initially, for the first few years, courses were organized for clinicians working elsewhere in the country and performing postmortem examinations. Starting in the mid-sixties, the Faculty of the Department started organizing continued educational activities, various courses, individual training programmes, extramural education, teaching conferences and symposia for pathomorphologists. Starting in the mid-seventies, special emphasis was put on ongoing education of the already well-trained cadre, but there was a permanent shortage of pathomorphologists (“a specialty in short supply”), and even if some were found, then lack of access to professional literature and textbooks in remote areas of the country strengthened the requirement for the organization of courses for physicians undergoing their postgraduate specialty training. For almost 30 years, the Department of Pathomorphology of the Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education (CMKP) was almost the only institution that focused on the problem of postgraduate training in pathomorphology (another centre that held such courses was the Department of Cancer Pathology, Institute of Oncology in Warsaw, which organized 2-month “obligatory” training courses prior to the participants’ sitting for specialization examinations in pathomorphology). Medical academies and research institutes organized sporadic educational events, but they were not necessarily provided as an element of some “centralized plan” and did not take place regularly. It can thus be justly said that Professor Maria Kobuszewska-Faryna and the Department of Pathomorphology of CMKP she headed is the “historical” venue of training for specialists in pathomorphology and that the courses the Department organized were attended by almost all future professors, associate professors and heads of departments situated all over Poland. This capital cannot be neglected in any deliberations on further activities of Professor Kobuszewska-Faryna and the Department. Let us quote some statistical data that best illustrate their work:

In 1971, the Centre of Medical Training was transformed into the Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education. It was not necessarily a well-thought-out decision, as it had been dictated by politics, and its after-effects are felt even today. But opinions were of no importance to the Professor; what was important was finding a rightful place in the new situation and salvaging whatever could be salvaged in the realm of postgraduate training. That is why in 1971 she accepted the offer of being appointed Head of the Centre of Basic Sciences (equivalent to Dean), which she held up to 1977; in the dark times of martial law (1981-1990), she was Vice-Director for Education. In the years 1961-2000, the Departments of Pathomorphology of the Bielański Hospital and the Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education prepared programmes and organized 215 courses with various didactic forms and durations (from seven days to three months) and 59 National Conferences for top managerial staff heading various Departments of Pathomorphology. The courses and individual training programmes were attended by 1892 physicians, mostly pathomorphologists, and the number of participants in conferences was 3149.

Research activities

It is impossible to evaluate anybody's scholarly achievements without taking into consideration the time in which a scientist was fated to work. For the young physician, fresh from university, this was not only the post-war period with its shortages of virtually everything, but also the period of post-war science and the university education system being formed. At that stage, there were no standards whatsoever, no international classifications, and the notion of a diagnosis was largely associated with personal experience and development of unquestioned authorities in medicine, such as Professors L. Paszkiewicz or J. Laskowski. Research mainly concentrated on descriptions of "interesting cases" or rare disease entities. In addition, apart from the Polish Medical Weekly (*Polski Tygodnik Lekarski*), there were practically no medical periodicals – such periodicals were slowly emerging or were yet to emerge, and publishing one's articles abroad was unheard of. In spite of so difficult a time, Maria Kobuszevska started her research work, publishing twenty-one case reports and original papers in the years 1946-1961. The crowning element of this stage in her life was her doctoral dissertation "Ectopic chorionepitheliomas in females" of April 1951. Accelerated development of research activities carried out by Associate Professor M. Kobuszevska-Faryna took place when she became head of the Bielański Department, and ran parallel to the development of modern techniques and research laboratories. Her

academic achievements include 10 doctoral dissertations she supervised, 32 original publications, 23 review papers, 16 case reports, 16 communications presented at congresses and 9 obituaries. She was a co-editor of 2 books, 9 chapters in textbooks, and 7 published reviews of books. Professor Kobuszevska-Faryna reviewed 14 doctoral dissertations and 4 papers prepared by physicians seeking the title of associate professor; she also prepared reviews of 74 doctoral dissertations, 55 associate professorship papers and 34 opinions for would-be professors and full professors. In the Department of Pathomorphology of Bielański Hospital she also supervised 24 physicians undergoing their specialization training.

In 1965, the Scientific Council nominated Maria Kobuszevska-Faryna professor, and in 1985 full professor. Her work was many times awarded and she received numerous decorations, such as the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, the 10 Years of the People's Polish Republic Commemorative Medal, and the Commission of National Education Medal. She was also conferred various honorary titles (Distinguished Teacher and Distinguished Physician), was awarded a badge of merit "For Exemplary Work in Health Service" and many other distinctions.

Professor Maria Kobuszevska-Faryna was a founding member of the Polish Society of Anatomopathologists, where she held the positions of Treasurer (1959-1965) and Chairman of the Board (1973-1979), and was an honoris causa member of the Polish Society of Pathologists.

From 1962, she was a member of the Committee of Morphological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Science. She actively participated in the work of the Polish Medical Society, where she served as Chairperson of the Section of Medical Studies (1972-1974). The Society awarded her the title of "Medicus Nobilis". From 1959, she was a member of the Programme Council of the Department of Medical Film Production affiliated to the Central Medical Library. She was a member of the Polish Society of Anatomy and the Polish Society of Oncology, a founding member of the Polish Association of Neuropathologists, and an honorary corresponding member of the Polish Society of Forensic Medicine and Criminology.

Professor Kobuszevska-Faryna was also active in numerous foreign associations; she was a founding member (1964) of the European Society of Pathology and the Association for Medical Education in Europe, an honorary member of the Yugoslav Association of Pathology (1975), and an ordinary member of the Société Française de Cytologie Clinique (from 1984) and the Société Anatomique de Paris (from 1985).

In association with her professional work, she travelled abroad on two occasions: in 1954, to Czechoslovakia, where she stayed for three weeks; and in 1960, to France, where she spent three months, getting to know the activities of pathological anatomy institutions.

The years 2000-2009

This was a period of a gradual “slowing down” in Professor Kobuszevska-Faryna’s professional activities, but not necessarily in her life. She continued coming to the Department, where she was a part time consultant, but she became increasingly more open to her family and to the ever-decreasing group of World War II veterans, for whom she served as a “family physician”, accessible for 24 hours a day. The “Dr. Mary” persona of the period of the Warsaw Uprising was deeply embedded in her soul, and the Professor was always ready to help make arrangements for veterans to visit a doctor or stay in hospital. She was deeply interested in their living problems, just as she had previously been interested in the autumn of Professor Paszkiewicz and Professor Dąbrowska’s lives.

The obituary would not be complete if we neglected to mention Professor Kobuszevska-Faryna’s family. Her daughter Hanna (like her brother Jan and sister Hanna) was an art historian who opened for Maria the splendid world of art and culture, a world where there was always enough time to visit a museum, the theatre or cinema. Culture was for the Professor a value indispensable for practising the profession of a physician, and communing with high culture was for her an antidote to the times she was fated to live in. Her son Jan is a well-known pathomorphologist and continues the work of his mother. Nevertheless, as often happens, her interests were predominantly focused on her beloved grandchildren (and great-grandson) and their lives. Her granddaughters (Zuzanna and Joanna), grandsons (Tomek and Andrzej) and her great-grandson Bruno did not choose a career in medicine, but nevertheless were a tremendous source of happiness and motivation for her.

Closing this obituary of such an extraordinary and eminent personage, it is hard to resist quoting an entry from the guest book of the Department. The entry was made by Professor Janina Dąbrowska in 1961:

Even if you don't finish, go on working,

The grave shall get you, not your work.

What you cannot complete yourself,

Start it and then... leave it for others to continue.

There is nothing more to say – not a single detail has been left untold; having been professionally associated with Professor Maria Kobuszevska-Faryna for 39 years, I can only assure her that she has left behind a task for generations to come, which will have to be continued not only by me, but also by my

successors, since there is still so much to do... But with such an example set by the Master, we will surely manage.

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