


THE ONLY ONES IN EUROPE

Jerzy Woy-Wojciechowski

HONORARY PRESIDENT OF POLISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (PTL), WARSAW, POLAND

Wiad Lek. 2024;77(2):363-365. doi: 10.36740/WLek202402127 

In the 19th Century great development in science, including medicine, has been observed. Poland, however, for 123 years had limited contact with international medicine, especially under Russian Partition. It was also difficult to inform the West about our successes and revelations in medicine. Professor's A. Leśniowski's Colitis is a great example, as he was a man from nowhere for the Western Europe, as stated by M. Kawalec.¹⁾ Those were the hard years of exiles to Siberia and two world wars, followed by 44 years of Soviet supremacy and falsifying history.²⁾

All this made Polish medicine function in an independent country for only 20 years before 1989. During the tragic era of World War II, 50% of physicians were killed (over 6000 out of 12000 alive in 1939). The only memorial plaque dedicated to those killed has been embedded by Polish Medical Association into the wall of Ujazdowski Hospital in 1989. Each year on September 1st they are remembered by physicians.³⁾

Medical Universities hold lectures on Polish medicine history, teaching students about the times since King Augustus Poniatowski until the modern times. Museums play a major role in spreading knowledge about culture, history and national heritage. Poland can be dubbed a state of museums. There are museums of buttons, axes or Christmas Tree baubles.⁴⁾

According to the Central Statistical Office, in 2017 museums in Poland had 37,5 million visitors, (by 3,2 % more than in 2016). Still, among **981** museums, there is **no museum of medicine**.⁵⁾ Yes, we are the only European state to not have such museum!!! At the same time the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage states, that it supervises and finances as many as 985 museums.⁶⁾

I would like to underline that Polish Medical Association greatly respects the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, despite creating the Institute of Theater in surgical hall of former Ujazdowski Hospital contrary to our many-decade-long efforts to found a museum of medicine there. There was also a ministerial plan to

use the hall of Central Medical Library for another institute... this time the Institute of Dance.⁷⁾ In 2018 Central Statistical Office stated that there are 188 theaters and 949 hospitals in Poland. Well... Medicine sometimes becomes particularly important and noticeable, for example during the pandemic, but not when talking of such piece of trivia as museum of medicine. When I have become a member of the Polish Medical Association in 1970 I have already raised the problem of the lack of museum of medicine in Poland, which would be open to public. There are museums within structures of several medical universities, but they are not publicly accessible (with the exception of the House of Kraków Medical Society, Radziwiłłowska 2 street, with beautiful stained-glass window by Stanisław Wyspiański).

This marked the beginning of my never-ending journey to found the museum of medicine in the hall of former Ujazdowski Hospital in Warsaw, Jazdów 1a street.⁸⁾ There have been countless visits and dozens of letters sent. So far these enrich our archive. Sadly... no positive decision came.⁹⁾ Some policymakers before 2015 were more interested by the already existing „museum of Polish devils” then by museum of medicine.

I would like to underline with pleasure, that many individuals support our efforts to found the National Museum of Medicine. Among them is the First Lady, earlier we have been supported by the late President of Poland Lech Kaczyński, remembered with enlightenment, by President of Warsaw Stanisław Wyganowski, by Mazowsze Governor Bohdan Jastrzębski and by Minister of Health Zbigniew Religa. So far my effort is not worth more than a common button, which I may hand over to the museum of buttons, located in Łowicz. Still, I believe that I will make it through to see the POLISH NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MEDICINE. I am young at heart, and I have been applying for founding this museum for merely 50 years.

¹⁾Antoni Leśniowski described the ileitis as early as 1903, while B. Crohn did so 29 years later. Still, Western

physicians credit the latter with the name of this condition. Magdalena Kawalec-Segond, in an elaborate article notices, that „Partitions were so destructive for Poland, because if one wills to become someone, one may not come from nowhere; Antoni Leśniowski was from nowhere for the World” (TVP Tygodnik, issue 65). Similarly, the sedimentation of blood described by Edmund Bieracki in 1894 is worldwide called the Westergren method, described 25 years later. Also Jakub Jodko-Narkiewicz described the so-called „aura” in 1896. Soviet Siemion Kirlian did so 34 years later, but the propaganda credits him with the first description. In December 1805 the first Polish medical association was founded in Vilnius, initiated by Jędrzej Śniadecki. It was first in this part of Europe, and even the first on our invader’s – Tsarist Russia – territory. The second one was founded in Petersburg in 1901, also initiated by Polish physicians.

²⁾Dr. Piotr Szarejko, spent many years searching the archives and the Great Soviet Encyclopedia for the materials to his multi-volume work „Polish Physicians of the 19th Century” („Lekarze Polscy XIX wieku”). He found out that about 20 Polish physicians had their nationality changed to Russian.

³⁾ As former KGB major Oleg Zakirow states, NKVD had murdered 25000 Polish officers between 1940 and 1945. Among them were over 850 physicians. The only memorial plaque commemorating them was embedded into the wall of surgical hall of former Ujazdowski Hospital on 50th Anniversary of II World War outbreak. See: „DZIEJE.PL. Portal Historyczny PAP”. Update: 14.07.2016, Published: 01.09.2013 *Wiadomości*, and also: Jerzy Woy-Wojciechowski „Moje towarzystwo”, published by Domena, 2015.

Plaque commemorating physicians murdered by NKVD in Katyń is in The Church of The Holy Cross, Krakowskie Przedmieście street in Warsaw (the first chapel on the right).

⁴⁾ Among hundreds of museums there are the following: Buttons in Łowicz, Unusual Bicycles (Gołąb near Lublin), Bread (Radzionków), Axes (Orzechówka), Fairytales (Czarnków), Christmas Tree Baubles (Nowa Dęba), Bedtime Cartoons (Rzeszów), Bells (Jastrzębie-Zdrój), Grand Pianos (Ostromecko), Dolls (Pilzno and Troszyn), Soap and Dirt (Bydgoszcz), Scissors (Tarnogród), Polish Song (Opole), Beekeeping (Czerwonka, Kamianna. Stróże), Gingerbread (Toruń), Toys (Karpacz, Kudowa Zdrój, Toruń), Twirls (Poznań).

⁵⁾ WE HAVE 921 MUSEUMS IN POLAND (as of 2018 official statistics): 180 regional, 171 historical, 91 of art, 72 interdisciplinary, 63 military, 63 of technology and science, 60 other, 55 biographic, 37 ethnographic, 35 open-air, 32 of archaeology, 28 of martyrdom, 28 of nature, 15 geological, 10 of interiors, 9 of literature. Total of 921.

⁶⁾According to 23.09.2020 data, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage finances 895 museums, therein: 11 national, 15 regional, 55 biographic, 14 ethnographic, 50 open-air ethnographic, 26 open-air technology museums, 13 other museums and open-air museums, 42 historical, 43 of nature, geology and geography, 16 of art, 39 in palaces, castles and mansions, 64 sacral and religious, 68 military, 75 other.

⁷⁾Author has been granted „Distinguished Worker of Culture” medal as early as 1966. Ministry of Culture would receive annual invitations to the ceremony of honoring physicians with Gloria Medicinae medal. This resulted in creating (16 years later, in 2005) the Gloria Artis medal. Inquiry sent to the Ministry of Culture for the support of creating the museum of medicine in surgical hall of former Ujazdowski Hospital ended in founding the Institute of Theater (!) there. The explanation was that the hall in „on the royal tract” (Polish Medical Association also inquired for the creation of museum of medicine in the lobby of the Grand Theater in Warsaw, which is not on the tract).

⁸⁾SELECTED INFORMATION REGARDING UJAZDOWSKI HOSPITAL. Ujazdowski Hospital functioned between 1807 and 1947. In the inter-war period, a high school of military physicians was there. On the wall of surgical hall, there is a plaque dedicated to Gen. Karol Kaczkowski, the Chief Physician of 1831 Uprising. Since 1989 there is also a plaque commemorating 6000 physicians (over 50% of all) killed during the latest war. There were books written about the history of Ujazdowski Hospital (Halina Odrowąż-Szukiewicz – „Rzeczpospolita Ujazdowska”) and it appeared in films (Bogdan Kezik – „Szpital Ujazdowski”, Warsaw 2001). The historic hall of former Ujazdowski Hospital (Aleje Ujazdowskie 6a street, Warsaw) with its old-print department of Central Medical Library would be an ideal place for a museum. The area of former Ujazdowski Hospital has 0,75 ha, a fragment of parcel number 6 in precinct 5-06-12 which is 5,1 ha large and is at disposal of Centre for Contemporary Art, located in Ujazdowski Castle and being a State Treasury property. For over 50 years Warsaw authorities have vowed to help Polish Medical Association in founding the NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MEDICINE in one of former Ujazdowski Hospital halls. In 1998 Governor of Warsaw region Bohdan Jastrzębski vowed to hand over the hall at Jazdów 1 street for the sake of founding the museum. His death made completing the formalities impossible. The last visit at the office of Governor of Mazowsze Konstany Radziwiłł with an inquiry to support founding museum of medicine in former Ujazdowski Hospital hall took place on June 8th, 2020.

⁹Selected data regarding efforts to found the museum of medicine. 1970. Idea to create museum of medicine in former Ujazdowski Hospital (Jazdów 1a street). 1971. Dr. Maria Rozwadowska and dr. Jerzy Woy-Wojciechowski visit eng. Biegański, head architect of Warsaw to obtain hall of former Ujazdowski Hospital for the museum of medicine. 1973. Director of National Museum prof. Jan Lorentz suggests that the museum should be created in hospital in Wilanów (Biedronki 6 street). 1981. Janusz Gąsiorowski – chairman of accommodation affairs in the National Capital Council denies handing the hall of former Ujazdowski Hospital over. 1990. Visit at the office of Stanisław Wyganowski, President of Warsaw, who greatly supported our efforts. 2000. Visit at the office of Deputy Governor A. Pietkiewicz (who supported). 2004. Polish President A. Kwaśniewski orders the Minister of Culture Waldemar Dąbrowski to organize Museum of Medicine in the surgical hall of Ujazdowski Hospital. After restoration Minister of Culture creates the Insti-

tute of Theater there!!! 2005. Visit at the office of Minister of Health Zbigniew Religa (great support). 2007. Visit at the office of Polish President Lech Kaczyński (great support). 2008. Meeting with senator Krystyna Bochenek (wife of cardiac surgeon); inquiry for the Polish Senate to support our efforts. 2010. Visit at the office of Supreme Medical Chamber president Maciej Hamankiewicz. (who supported). 2012. J. Woy-Wojciechowski presents 49 years of efforts to Healthcare Commission of Polish Senate. 2017. Letter with inquiry to support 48 years of effort to create National Museum of Medicine was sent to Jarosław Kaczyński, chief of Law and Justice party. 2020. Visit (June 6th) at the office of Mazowsze Governor Konstanty RADZIWIŁŁ with an inquiry to support 50 year long effort to found the National Museum of Medicine. Letter was sent to Minister of Culture, prof. Gliński. 2021. Follow-up letter was sent to Minister of Culture, prof. Gliński with inquiry to support founding Museum of Medicine. As in the year 2020, left with no answer.