

Leszek Ceremużyński: A giant of Polish cardiology (1932–2009)

Professor Leszek Ceremużyński was a well-known and highly-regarded person in both Polish and international medical and cardiological communities.

He was born in 1932 in Lublin. He studied medicine at the Warsaw Medical School (Akademia Medyczna) in 1950–1955. For a short time following graduation, he was assigned to work in the Ministry of Health. He served his term in the army in a local hospital in Żary in 1957–1959. Later, he worked as a primary care physician in Warsaw and at the same time he volunteered in the Fourth Department of Medicine at the Warsaw Medical School (head of the department: Prof. Z. Askanas).

In December 1960, Dr Ceremużyński became an assistant physician in this department and he worked there for the next 14 years. During this time, he passed board certification in internal medicine and in 1965 he received a doctorate (Doctor of Medicine). His habilitation thesis was ready by 1968 but was withheld for another 2 years due to opposition from the local communist party authorities at the medical school. In 1970, he received a habilitation degree (*doktor habilitowany*, approximate equivalent of university lecturer) for his thesis entitled “Blood and urinary catecholamines, thyroid and adrenal cortex function, and insulin level in uncomplicated or complicated myocardial infarction”. Since that time, he served as the Deputy Director for Scientific Affairs of the Institute of Cardiology at the Warsaw Medical School.

In 1968–1972, he went for several scientific and clinical placements to cardiological centers in London, Edinburgh, Prague, Budapest and Berlin. Prof. Ceremużyński turned out to be one of the most brilliant students of the eminent cardiological school of Professor Askanas. At that time, scientific interests of Prof. Ceremużyński were related to humoral and hormonal response to acute myocardial infarction. Together with his co-workers, he published a number of innovative experimental and clinical papers showing a detrimental effect of catecholamine excess on the myocardium, the role of thyroid and adrenal hormones in myocardial infarction, and the



importance of relative insulin deficiency and hyperglycemia in the course of myocardial infarction. Prof. Ceremużyński was involved in research on a number of metabolic interventions in myocardial infarction, including the use of beta-blockers, clonidine, glucose-insulin-potassium infusion, steroids and thiamazole.

In 1974, Dr Ceremużyński left his home department to become the head of an internal medicine ward in a city hospital (*Szpital Grochowski*) in Warsaw and transform it into an academic teaching department. He was the chief cardiology consultant of the city of Warsaw in 1975–1983. He became a university professor (*profesor nadzwyczajny*) in 1984 and was promoted to full professor (*profesor zwyczajny*) in 1993.

In 1980, the Research and Teaching Center (*Ośrodek Naukowo-Dydaktyczny*) of the Warsaw Medical School at the Grochowski Hospital became the Second Department of Cardiology at the Medical Center for Postgraduate Education (*Centrum Medycznego Kształcenia Podyplomowego*) and Prof. Ceremużyński was appointed the head of the department. In subsequent years, he was devoted to the development of this cardiology center, starting with only humble equipment and a small team. By 2002, 40 physicians in the department became board-certified in internal medicine, and 12 passed board certification in cardiology. Prof. Ceremużyński supervised 18 doctoral theses and 5 habilitation theses (M. Dłużniewski, A. Budaj, P. Kułakowski, B. Bednarz and T. Jaxa-Chamiec).

In that time, Prof. Ceremużyński was involved in the research regarding the role of the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system, platelet and leukocyte activation, and magnesium deficiency in myocardial infarction. Prof. Ceremużyński was the principal author of the first Polish multicenter trial to evaluate the effectiveness of amiodarone in myocardial infarction. This study, known as the Polish Amiodarone Trial, is the most frequently cited Polish study in cardiology.

Prof. Ceremużyński was a pioneer of international multicenter clinical trials in Poland. His scientific

experience and international position allowed cooperation with renowned cardiological centers such as Oxford University (Prof. Peter Sleight) and McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada (Prof. Salim Yusuf). This cooperation resulted in participation of many Polish cardiological centers in a number of well-known studies such as ISIS-3, ISIS-4, CORE, OASIS-2, CURE, and MICHELANGELO OASIS-5.

Difficulties with acquiring new equipment for the Department of Cardiology led Prof. Ceremużyński to establish the Proclinica Foundation. Funds that were raised by the Foundation were used to modernize echocardiography and exercise testing labs and create new invasive electrophysiology and cardiac catheterization laboratory. Nowadays, the department is a 98-bed, tertiary reference center with a 24-hour capability of invasive treatment of myocardial infarction, performing sophisticated electrophysiology procedures and serving more than 4000 patients a year.

For 13 years, Prof. Ceremużyński organized very popular yearly teaching conferences in the Polski Theater in Warsaw, providing a review of the current cardiology literature to about 1000 participants. Both during these conferences and everyday teaching activities, Prof. Ceremużyński introduced modern standards of presentations and lectures. Didactic activities of Prof. Ceremużyński were always highly valued by the participants.

An important area of the activities of Prof. Ceremużyński was the Polish Cardiac Society (*Polskie Towarzystwo Kardiologiczne*). He was Secretary of the Board since 1970, Vice-president since 1986, and the President of the Polish Cardiac Society in 1990–1995. He also had various responsibilities within the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) committees — he was a member of the Scientific Committee of ESC congresses for many years, and a member of the ESC Nominating Committee in 2000–2002. In 1996, he was invited to an expert group to develop ESC guidelines on the management of angina pectoris.

His two terms as the President of the Polish Cardiac Society were a breakthrough period for this organization, with increasing number of members, growing international cooperation, more international nature of the Polish Cardiac Society scientific congresses, and the establishment of a young cardiologists' scientific club to promote careers of young researchers in cardiology. With recommendations of Prof. Ceremużyński, other Polish cardiologists were elected to ESC organizational structures.

In 1990–2005, Prof. Ceremużyński was the Editor of the Polish Heart Journal (*Kardiologia Polska*), the official journal of the Polish Cardiac Society.

With his enormous activity in this field, the Polish Heart Journal became a highest-ranked medical journal, indexed in the Medline scientific database and financially independent, with circulation exceeding 4000 copies. The Polish Heart Journal has hosted many initiatives to integrate Polish cardiological community.

Prof. Ceremużyński was a member of editorial boards of many cardiological journals including Evidence-Based Cardiology, Internet Journal Timely Topics in Medicine, Cardiovascular Diabetology, and Journal of Heart Disease.

He was a Fellow of the European Society of Cardiology, Fellow of the American College of Cardiology, Fellow of the British Cardiac Society, Fellow of the European Society of Clinical Investigations, an Honorary Member of the Hungarian Cardiac Society, and an Honorary Member of the Polish Cardiac Society.

He was a member of the Board of Scientific Advisors to the Polish Ministry of Health (1976–1980), the Committee of Pathophysiology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (1974–1980), and the Scientific Board of the Institute of Cardiology (1980–1990).

Prof. Ceremużyński published about 150 papers, including more than 80 papers in foreign journals. Overall, his works were cited about 1200 times. In addition, he was a member of scientific committees in published trials that were cited about 2100 times. He gave several dozens of invited lectures abroad and chaired more than 30 sessions during international congresses, also serving as a member of their scientific committees.

A notable area of the social activity of Prof. Ceremużyński was a civic committee to build a cardiological hospital named after Marshal Józef Piłsudski (*Obywatelski Komitet Budowy Szpitala Kardiologicznego im. Marszałka J. Piłsudskiego*), founded in 1989. Due to large but unsatisfied need for modern cardiological care in Warsaw, Prof. Ceremużyński became involved in the initiative to build a publicly funded cardiological hospital, attracting many respectful and influential persons to this idea. Despite difficulties and delays, implementation of this great plan seems possible.

Prof. Ceremużyński was an eminent cardiologist and scientist. He trained a whole generation of physicians, including 4 professors of medicine. He created one of the most active cardiological centers in Poland. He was a creative successor of the cardiological school of Professor Askanas and the author of innovative medical discoveries cited in classical textbooks. He was a giant of Polish cardiology, both as the president of the Polish Cardiac Society and as the Editor of the Polish Heart Journal for many years.

Editorial Board of *Kardiologia Polska*
(Polish Heart Journal)