

Institute Of Maritime And Tropical Medicine in Gdynia on the 70th anniversary of its foundation (1939–2009) — history, staff, achievements

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"Time is like the wind, we are like the waves"
A.Ch. Swinburne

EDITORIAL NOTE:

This paper may open a line of texts on the history of institutes and centres of maritime health in other countries. They are invited to send us such texts, which will be published in the next issues of the IMH journal.

Beginning with the history of the institution, in the text described there may be: its mission, activities, organizational structure and staff, main achievements and implemented projects, and international collaboration.

On 5 June 1937, in connection with the rapid growth of the national shipping industry and the town and port, a Branch of the Central State Institute of Hygiene (Warszawa) was established in Gdynia (in the building at 50, Starowiejska Street), at that time the only large sea port in the country. Its head was Dr med. Józef Jakubkiewicz, a specialist in tropical medicine [1]. The workers of the Gdynia Branch studied as participants of courses at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and at the Institute in Marseille. The Branch gradually developed to become, in June 1939, the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Hygiene, and the new head was Dr med. Jerzy Morzycki. His co-workers were doctors S. Byczkowski, M. Janicki, S. Rutkowski, and T. Przyborowski.

The development of the national shipping industry was connected with the need for Poland to abide with international conventions on sanitary protection of coastal waters and national borders. The "tropical" component was introduced to the structure of the institute because in the 1930s contact with the tropics increased and great numbers of

emigrants from Poland travelled every year to settle in South American countries.

Just before the beginning of the Second World War, the Institute had departments of bacteriology for food and water control, a department of industrial hygiene and occupational diseases, a laboratory for rat control, a special laboratory for exotic infections, and a laboratory of climatology.

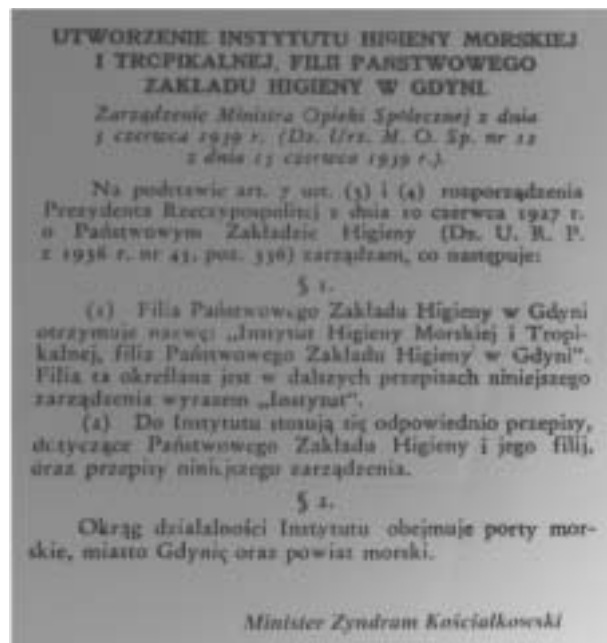


Figure 1. Announcement of the Minister of Health of the Polish Republic on the establishment of the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Hygiene in Gdynia on 15 June 1939

By mid 1939, 12 papers on subjects related to maritime and tropical medicine had been published as the "Gdynia Series".

In 1938, a course of helminthology, including tropical parasitology, was organized which was attended by 25 health workers from Gdynia. The statutory duties of the Institute covered the health protection of the local community and of maritime industry workers, sanitary protection of state borders, and the continuing education and training of specialists in maritime and tropical medicine and hygiene.

After the end of World War II, in 1945 the Institute was re-opened as the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine, one of the first research centres of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk. Associate professor E. Nowicki, MD was appointed as its director, followed by Prof. J. Morzycki, MD in 1946. The Institute was located at 1 Morska Street in Gdańsk and had 5 departments: Bacteriology and Epidemiology, Parasitology, Maritime and Tropical Hygiene, a Clinical Division, and a Maritime Biological Station.

In the years 1945–1957, the main activities of the Institute were: sanitary protection of state borders, control of epidemics of poliomyelitis, smallpox detection and prevention, epidemiology and control of tick-borne meningitis and tularemia, and diagnosis of intestinal infections and food poisoning. Prof. Morzycki's outstanding merit was to draw the attention of Polish scientists to the problems of medical parasitology. The First National Conference on Parasitology was held in 1948 in Gdańsk, and the Polish Parasitological Association was established [1].

A number of scientific workers subsequently became professors, including: doctors W. Bincer, F. Bławat, W. Bogusławski, Z. Kozar, J. Lachmajer, S. Kryński, E. Pautsch, E. Skrodzki, and E. Sym, who joined the staff of the Institute, conducted research, and organized training activities.

In 1948 the Institute begun publishing its own Bulletin, the title of which was changed to International Maritime Health in 1999, and has been published until this day, now in printed and internet versions.

After Prof. J. Morzycki's death in 1954, Prof. S. Kryński, MD, PhD became director of the Institute, and he was followed by Prof. Z. Buczowski, MD, PhD in the years 1955–1972, Prof. Dolmierski in 1972–1989, Dr W. Renke in 1989–1999, and in later years Prof. J. Górski, Dr Z. Sićko, Dr. W. Nahorski, Prof. P. Myjak, and, from 2008 until the present day, Prof. B. Jaremin.

In 1957, the name of the Institute was changed to the Institute of Maritime Medicine, and it became an independent scientific research institute of the Ministry of Health. At that time, the National Salmonella Centre with Bacteriophage Typing was founded, which closely cooperated with

the WHO. The centre was headed by Prof. Z. Buczowski, who created a solid base for routine and scientific investigations into the problem of human and animal salmonellosis in this country. This work was later taken over by Prof. R. Głońska, MD, PhD.

In 1960, the Tularemia Reference Centre for Poland, under the guidance of Prof. E. Skrodzki MD, PhD, was founded. At the same time, the Virology Laboratory was set up with Prof. F. Bławat MD, PhD in charge, which was engaged in smallpox research. The Laboratory of Helminthology and Protozoology, headed by Prof. Z. Kozar, MD, PhD, became the National Toxoplasmosis Centre.

In 1963, the Clinic of Occupational Diseases of the Institute was opened, as a Ward of the Polish Red Cross Hospital in Gdynia Redłowo, with the Caisson Disease Treatment Pavilion. The subsequent heads of the Clinic were: Prof. W. Bincer, MD, PhD, Prof. W. Kierst, MD, PhD, Dr L. Łaba, MD, Assoc. Prof. J. Chmielewski, MD, PhD, Prof. J. Górski, and Dr B. Jaremin, MD.

Prof. W. Kierst was the Editor of the textbook "Compendium of Tropical Medicine", written by staff members of the Institute. Other important publications of the Institute included two editions of the National Medical Guide for Ships and later on the Tropical Hygiene and Travel and Health Guide.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the principal tasks of the Institute included: the diagnosis and prevention of infectious, parasitic, and tropical diseases; the study of problems of health of seafarers, fishermen, divers, and shipyard and dock workers; and the promotion and protection of the health of national maritime workers. In these two decades, the national fleet of merchant and fishing ships grew quickly: the shipyards in Gdynia, Gdańsk, and Szczecin produced hundreds of seagoing ships for export, and the number of national seafarers grew to about 25 000, and fishermen to about 15 000.

The staff of the Institute increased to over 200. Research projects were implemented, and in the journal of the Institute about 40–60 papers were published each year, written by national scientists and maritime medicine specialists from abroad. Among their authors were staff members of the Institute, of which the names of many were mentioned above, and Prof. A. Dolatkowski, Dr A. Krynicki, Dr K. Pietkiewicz, Dr J. Lalko, Dr B. Skierska, Prof. Z. Wegner, Dr P. Myjak, Dr M. Szudarski, Dr L. Łaba, Dr C. Zwierz, Professors K. and A. Taylor, Prof. Z. Buczowska, Dr K. De Walden-Gałaszko, Dr W. Ejsmont, Prof. J. Waśkiewicz, Prof. M. Cempel, Dr J. Dąbrowski, Dr W. Gwoździewicz, Dr P. Mikulski, Dr R. Wiglusz, Dr B. Jaremin, Dr W. Nahorski, Dr J. Chmielewski, Dr L. Zaborski, Dr R. Tomaszewski, Prof. J. Filikowski, Dr W. Renke, Dr S. Tomaszunas, and others.

In 1974 the Institute was renamed the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine in Gdynia. The work was re-oriented to focus more on problems of occupational medicine, new departments and laboratories (Department of Psychology of Labour) were set up, and the activities of the clinic and of the Department of Hygiene were intensified.

The Institute established close cooperation with institutes of maritime medicine in other countries, and with international organizations. In March 1963, maritime medicine specialists from the German Democratic Republic, Poland, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and West Germany met for the first time in Heiligendamm in the GDR, discussed health problems of seafarers and fishermen, exchanged experiences, and decided to meet regularly in future. From that time, International Symposia on Maritime Medicine were regularly organized at 2 years intervals, with the growing participation of experts from many maritime countries. The symposia in 1965, 1974, and 1989 were held in Poland. The example of international meetings on maritime medicine was followed, and since the June 1991 Symposium held in Turku, Finland, the two separate lines (Eastern and Western) of such scientific meetings have been merged [2].

In 1972, the Institute was appointed as the WHO Inter-regional Reference Centre for Maritime Medicine, and over the years, it has provided various services for the WHO, ILO, and IMO. Experts from the Institute participated in meetings of the Joint ILO/WHO Committee on the Health of Seafarers held in Geneva, the leading subjects of which were: Health Training of Ship Personnel, Immersion Hypothermia, Work-related Accidents on Ships, Drug and Alcohol Abuse on Ships, Medical Examinations of Seafarers, International Medical Guide for Ships, etc. Scientists from the Institute prepared a number of opinions and working papers for these meetings. They also actively collaborated in writing two editions of the IMGS. In the 1980s and 1990s, they were Members of the WHO Expert Advisory Panels (Health of Seafarers). Workers of the Institute were also engaged as long-term staff and consultants in the implementation of the WHO global programmes of Malaria Eradication and Smallpox Eradication, and the WHO Expanded Programme on Immunization in Asian countries.

Being the WHO Collaborating Centre on Maritime Occupational Health, the Institute organized and conducted in Gdynia three international postgraduate training courses on maritime occupational health (in 1998, 1999, and 2002) and trained 85 doctors from 17 countries. Publishing the journal *International Maritime Health* is one of the projects implemented in Gdynia in collaboration with the WHO.

Through the initiative of the workers of the Institute, repeated in the years 1991, 1993, and 1995, during the International Symposia of Maritime Health, finally in 1997

the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) was established by participants of the meeting in Oslo, Norway.

The determined efforts of Dr W. Nahorski, MD resulted in the opening of Saint Lucas Medical Centre in Kifangondo in Angola [3], in which staff members of the Institute work for long periods of time. In the Department of Tropical Parasitology, under the guidance of Prof. Z. Wegner MD, PhD, important research work, including that on arthropods – the vectors of transmissible diseases, was conducted. After her retirement, the Department was taken over by Prof. P. Myjak, DSc, PhD. The new head implemented modern molecular methods to the research and diagnostic procedures.

Sanitary protection of coastal waters and borders has been the statutory duty of the Department of Environmental Protection and Hygiene of Transport, headed subsequently by Assoc. Prof. Z. Sobol, DEng. and J. Nowacki, Doctor of Geography. In 1985, the Institute was transferred to newly constructed premises – a complex of buildings in Gdynia Redłowo. In the 1990s, gradually more attention was directed towards increasing the scope of services of the Institute, and to economic problems. The National Centre for Hyperbaric Medicine (appointed by the Ministry of Health in 1998, head Dr Z. Sićko, MD) was established, the Radiology Department was set up, and the Laboratory Diagnosis Department was modernized. These achievements were attained due to efforts of the respective heads: Assoc. Prof. J. Felczak MD, PhD, and doctors H. Podgórczyk MD, E. Hać MD, and A. Winnicka, MD.

The educational and scientific activities of the 96-bed clinic of the Institute were expanded, and research on occupational diseases, tropical medicine, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal diseases, and diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs was conducted. This progress was achieved by the department heads: Doctors B. Jaremin MD and K. Gockowski MD, and Prof. J. Górski MD, PhD. The range of activities of the Microbiology and Immunology Department, as well as that of the Department of Tropical Parasitology, was expanded. The Laboratory of Molecular Biology was set up due to the efforts of Prof. P. Myjak, Dr H. Pietkiewicz, and Dr J. Stańczak DSc, PhD. The Department of Tropical Medicine, headed by Dr A. Kotłowski, has carried on its scientific and medical work in the field of tropical diseases and indigenous parasitic diseases.

In 2003, the Institute was included in the structure of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk (presently – the Medical University of Gdańsk) as the Inter-Faculty Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine.

The University Centre for Maritime and Tropical Medicine of the Autonomous Public Clinical Hospital of the Medical University of Gdańsk was formed. At present, the Hos-

pital University of Gdańsk was formed. At present, the Hospital has 4 clinics: the Clinic of Cardiology and Cardiac Rehabilitation, the Clinic of Occupational and Internal Diseases, the Clinic of Tropical and Parasitic Diseases, and the Clinic of Hyperbaric Medicine, with the respective Out-patient Departments. Dr Z. Sićko, MD was appointed director of the Hospital. In 2008 Prof. B. Jaremin MD, PhD was appointed director of the Inter-Faculty Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine, which has 9 departments and clinics. A total of 248 workers including 6 independent scientific research workers are presently employed in the Inter-Faculty Institute and the University Centre. There are 3 national reference centres: the National Centre for Hyperbaric Medicine founded in 1998 (head: Dr Z. Sićko), the National Centre for Tropical Medicine appointed in 2002 (head: Dr L. Nahorski) functioning on the basis of the Chair of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology (head: Prof. P. Myjak), and the National Centre for Maritime Medicine established in 2007 (head: Prof. B. Jaremin). The National Centre of travel Medicine was established recently, as the fourth one.

At present, the Inter-Faculty Institute comprises the Department of Environmental Toxicology (head: Prof. L. Wolska), the Department of Environmental Protection and Hygiene of Transport (head: Dr J. Nowacki), and the Department of Maritime Medicine – WHO Inter-regional Collaborating Centre on Maritime Occupational Health (acting Head: Prof. S. Tomaszunas).

Research work and practical activities continue. Every year about 4 research grant projects from the National Research Work Committee related to various topics (environmental pollution, harbour-related epidemiology, parasitology, immunology, microbiology, hyperbaric therapy, and clinical medicine) are implemented. The scientific workers perform about 30 statutory studies and publish 30–40 papers in international and national scientific journals. The Institute continues to publish “International Maritime Health” now a days edited by the Polish Society of Maritime and Tropical Medicine. During the 70-year history of the Institute, 2400 papers have been published, 67 scientific workers have obtained MD degrees, 25 – PhD degrees, and 27 have obtained the title of professor.

Cooperation with the WHO, the Ministry of National Defence, the National Academy of Sciences, and with several national and foreign institutes of maritime, tropical, and occupational medicine (in Atlanta, Hamburg, Lisbon,

Esbjerg, Bergen, Cardiff, Swansea, Brest, Rome, Odessa, Singapore and Turku) has continued. Every year a number of our scientific workers attend national and international conferences and symposia, and many guests visit our Institute. Education has been directed towards the training of specialists in maritime, tropical, and transport medicine as well as lecturing on biology, parasitology, maritime, tropical, occupational, and hyperbaric medicine. Diagnostic, therapeutic, prophylactic, health promotion, and legislative services are provided for several thousand patients every year.

The 70-year history of activities of the Institute can be divided into 3 periods: the first short period before World War II, during which the Institute was founded and began to form the base of the national maritime and tropical medicine. The second period covering about 20 post-war years was characterized by research and practical activities aimed at solving the actual public health problems (indigenous post-war malaria, poliomyelitis epidemics, tularemia, diarrhoeal diseases, imported smallpox, etc). In the longest, third period, the main activities concentrated on solving problems of maritime occupational health. Due attention was also paid to the training of specialists in maritime and tropical medicine, improving health care for the maritime industry workers, the standardization of medical procedures, improving vector control, the introduction of modern diagnostic and therapeutic methods in tropical pathology, developing hyperbaric medicine and psychophysiology of labour, and conducting research on the environmental problems affecting the population of the coastal region.

In 2009, the work of the Institute concentrates particularly on the diagnosis and treatment of imported malaria and other exotic diseases, hydatid disease, borreliosis, dengue, cardiovascular and occupational diseases, problems of hyperbaric medicine including the use of hyperbaric therapy of diseases, psychology of labour, toxicological and environmental problems, education, and international cooperation.

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