

Who performed the first cardiac catheterization in Poland: Krzemińska-Ławkowiczowa or Rutkowski?

To the editor On the centenary of internal medicine and cardiology teaching in Warsaw (1920–2020), Prof. Mściwój Semerau-Siemianowski is recalled. In the years 1918–1919, he worked in the 1st Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Warsaw under the supervision of Prof. Kazimierz Rzętkowski. Later, in the years 1948–1953, he was the head of the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine. On January 13, 2020, the first lecture of the series entitled “The Coryphaei of Warsaw Academic Medicine and Their Schools of Thought” was held at the Medical University of Warsaw. It was dedicated to Prof. Mściwój Semerau-Siemianowski, the father of modern cardiology. Also, an exhibition organized by the Museum of the History of Medicine at the Medical University of Warsaw was opened. In the publication devoted to this event, we read that in 1948 the Hemodynamic Laboratory was established in the Department, where the first cardiac catheterization in Poland was performed by Prof. Izabela Krzemińska-Ławkowiczowa. This information is repeated in other sources^{1,2} and indicates that the organization of the first Heart Catheterization Laboratory and the first catheterization in Poland in 1948 were accomplished either by her (then holding a PhD degree) alone or in collaboration with Prof. Mściwój Semerau-Siemianowski.

In the inaugural lecture delivered on October 18, 1948—the first one after taking over the position of the head of the Department—Prof. Mściwój Semerau-Siemianowski talked about cardiac catheterization, but did not refer to the experience of the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine of the University of Warsaw. Instead, he mentioned the procedures seen in 1947 in Sweden, at the Berglund department in Stockholm.

In the publication by Prof. Jerzy Rutkowski—a surgeon, the head of the 2nd Division and

Department of Surgery of the University of Łódź in the hospital located at 1/3 Sterlinga Street in Łódź—we can find the following sentence: “I performed the first cardiac catheterization in the female patient M. S. (see above) in November 1948, the next ones due to patent ductus arteriosus, aneurysm of the main artery, and other catheterizations in 1949 and later.”³

Given that the patient was admitted to the hospital on November 19, 1949, the catheterization could have been performed between November 19 and November 30, 1948.

Another publication⁴ confirmed the first heart catheterization in Poland performed by Prof. Jerzy Rutkowski.

In the publications by Prof. Izabela Krzemińska-Ławkowiczowa, no date or initials of the patient who underwent the first cardiac catheterization were mentioned. The only publication⁵ that allows us to speculate about the date of the first catheterization procedure in the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine was published in 1952 and referred to a lecture delivered at the meeting of the Cardiology Section of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine on April 2, 1950 in Poznań. In Table 1 therein (page 341), the initials, age, and registry numbers of 9 patients were listed in one of the columns. Some patient registry numbers are in the form XXXXX/50, which may indicate 1950 as the year when the procedure was conducted. Other numbers do not indicate any date. Patient registries from that period were destroyed.

In the archived reports on the activity of the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine from the years 1948/1949, 1949/1950, and 1950/1951, no data on the first cardiac catheterization in Poland can be found. Only the report from the academic year 1949/1950 includes information about establishing the Heart Catheterization Laboratory.

Who, then, performed the first cardiac catheterization in Poland? Krzemińska-Ławkowiczowa or Rutkowski?

I hope that my letter will start the discussion and the answer to this question will be found.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST None declared.

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