

# Professor Wiesława Tracz (1939–2020)

Piotr Podolec\*

1 Department of Cardiac and Vascular Diseases, Institute of Cardiology, Jagiellonian University Medical College, John Paul II Hospital, Kraków, Poland

It is a nearly impossible task to write a memoir about Professor Wiesława Tracz, with whom so many have associated their professional lives and careers over more than 30 years; a person—and personality—that so many respected and admired, and whose scope of activities (and the level of achievements) would make a number of extraordinary biographies.

Wiesława Tracz (FIGURE 1) was born in Gorzko-wice, Poland. Her initial professional career was associated with Łódź, Poland, where in 1962 she graduated from the Łódź School of Medicine and then worked for several years at the Department of Internal Medicine (head: Professor Włodzimierz Musiał) where she specialized in internal medicine and then in cardiology. Major research interests of Professor Tracz were driven, over the years, by her close collaboration with cardiac surgeons and involved defining the optimal timing and clinical criteria for surgery in congenital and acquired valvular heart disease, evaluation of long-term outcomes of surgical and pharmacological management in ischemic heart disease, valvular heart disease, and cardiac defects and malformations. She was always in the very forefront of applying novel technologies with the aim to improve clinical diagnosis and decision-making, impacting the patients' prognosis. In the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, she played an important role in defining the role of phonocardiography, polycardiography, and echocardiography that were gradually introduced to clinical medicine. This stage of work of Professor Tracz led to a doctoral degree in 1969 and the title of associate professor at the age of only 40 years, something extremely rare in those days. Her eye for spotting and developing the clinical potential of technological developments resulted in the first textbook in Poland on that topic entitled *Noninvasive methods in cardiovascular examinations* (published in 1982).



**FIGURE 1** Professor Wiesława Tracz in 2005 (courtesy of the Department of Cardiac and Vascular Diseases, John Paul II Hospital, Kraków, Poland)

In 1979, Professor Wiesława Tracz moved to Kraków to establish, together with Professor Antoni Działkowiak, Jerzy Sadowski, MD, PhD, Barbara Koziarowska, MD, PhD, Wanda Jarosik, MD, PhD, and Romuald Wirpszo, MD, PhD, a modern cardiovascular center. Her particular task was to create and organize the Department of Cardiology and Angiology, later renamed the Department of Cardiac and Vascular Diseases. She was head of department for 30 years, until she retired in 2009. These were the years of extremely intensive research and organizational work and teaching. Research interests of Professor Tracz developed together with the new challenges of clinical practice and the development of cardiology

**Correspondence to:**

Prof. Piotr Podolec, MD, PhD,  
John Paul II Hospital,  
ul. Prądnicka 80, 31-202 Kraków,  
Poland, phone: +48 12 614 22 87,  
email: ppodolec@interia.pl

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\* On behalf of the Professor Tracz's team at the Department of Cardiac and Vascular Diseases, John Paul II Hospital, Kraków, Poland

which she shaped not only in Kraków and Poland but also internationally. She spent a sabbatical at the Imperial College London to collaborate with the greatest of those days, including Sir Magdi Yacoub. Professor Tracz was then the driving force to implement, for the first time in Poland, a whole range of novel diagnostic and therapeutic modalities. She set new research directions and novel clinical avenues.

Professor Tracz was natural in her genuine engagement in not only encouraging research interests of her team but also in providing an enormous intellectual and organizational support. Once someone showed interest and will, she would always find a way. She supervised careers of dozens of specialists in internal medicine and cardiology. With her gift for spotting and developing a scientific talent, she supervised 19 doctoral degrees and 8 research careers leading to the associate professor positions. All those who became associate professors under the guidance of Professor Tracz, including Piotr Podolec, Piotr Odrowąż-Pieniążek, Tadeusz Przewłocki, Maria Olszowska, Magdalena Kostkiewicz, Henryk Siniawski, Mieczysław Pasowicz, and Anna Kabłak-Ziembicka are today full professors and continue their research endeavours on the path charted by Professor Tracz.

Research works of Professor Tracz include over 900 publications with a total impact factor of 550, h-index of almost 40, and nearly 20 000 citations. She authored several hundreds of leading congress presentations. She also authored or co-authored several textbooks, including the 4-volume *Practical Echocardiography* and over 50 textbook chapters. Professor Tracz acted as a national or local principal investigator in a number of multicenter international trials in cardiology. These impressive achievements resulted not only from exemplary hard work of Professor Tracz but also from her unique ability to stimulate her coworkers and her juniors, and the ability to create an environment to catalyze talent with experience.

The pace of research work by Professor Tracz was paralleled by the pace of her organizational work. In 2001 to 2008, she was (by election) the director of the Institute of Cardiology, Jagiellonian University Medical College in Kraków, Poland. Amongst many other congresses and symposia, she co-organized, in most instances as head of the organizing committee, highest-rank meetings such as the European Congress of the International Society of Non-Invasive Cardiology (Kraków 2001), International Congress of Valvular Heart Disease (Kraków 2003), Spring Conference of the Polish Cardiac Society (Kraków 2007, Kraków 2009). She was a member of the Polish Cardiac Society, Polish Society of Angiology, European Society of Cardiology, and European Society of Echocardiography. In 2004 to 2007 and 2007 to 2009, she was president of the Polish Cardiac Society Working Group on Valvular Heart Disease.

In 2006 to 2012, Professor Tracz was honorary consul of the Republic of Turkey in Kraków. Her promotion of tolerance and crosscultural bridges fertilized the cultural and economic exchange between the 2 nations. To facilitate the development of the Department of Cardiac and Vascular Diseases at the John Paul II Hospital in Kraków, she established the For The Heart Foundation that she headed in 1992 to 2013. Her retirement in 2009 did not stop her clinical and research activities. In 2009 to 2015, she was the rector of the Krakow College for Health Promotion. In the beginning of 2020, she was still consulting both outpatients and research manuscripts.

For her achievements, Professor Wiesława Tracz received a number of highest-rank medals, honors, and distinctions, including: the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, Gold and Silver Cross of Merit, Medal of the 600 Years of the Revival of Krakow Academy, Medal of the Minister of Health, and Prizes of the Minister of Health (1977, 1979), Polish Cardiac Society, Minister of Education, and Rector of the Jagiellonian University Medical College. In 2008, Professor Tracz received the highest honor of the Polish Cardiac Society—the title of the Honorary Member of the Polish Cardiac Society.

Professor Wiesława Tracz was most demanding and uncompromising. But she was also, and at the same time, an extremely warm, direct, and friendly boss, colleague, and person. The door of her office was always open to her coworkers and juniors. Her advice and help was not limited to the career or professional matters; she was also attentive to personal problems. She had that unique feature of persons who are truly great—she was not afraid of admitting that there are things she does not know, she was open to advice from her coworkers, and she would acknowledge receiving advice. She was able to effectively integrate the staff of her department through social meetings, anniversary symposia, and excursions.

Without any doubt, gardening and care for the beauty around were her passions along her care for homeless cats. Her warm and friendly attitude to patients, whom she never left out and for whom she served as the highest authority not only in matters of health but also of personal life, was exemplary. Just a few days before passing away, Professor Wiesława Tracz said, as her good-bye: "I have had a very beautiful life, and my work and the opportunity to guide the team of the department, were a unique source of satisfaction and joy."

A very rapidly progressing disease took her away from us as a fully active and passionate person. She left as a good, unique, and a truly great human being.

Today, the life and works of Professor Wiesława Tracz continue in those professional and personal lives she had shaped and influenced.

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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