

The sixtieth anniversary of the first pacemaker implantation in Poland

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September 12, 1963 is a very important date in the history of cardiac electrotherapy in Poland. This is the day when the first cardiac pacemaker in Poland was implanted. The procedure was performed by a surgeon Professor Zdzisław Kieturakis (Figure 1), in cooperation with cardiologists: Prof. Jakub Penson, Prof. Konstanty Leonowicz and Dr. Wojciech Kozłowski (Figure 2) from the 3rd Department of Internal Diseases, Medical University of Gdansk, directed by Prof. Mieczysław Gamski (Figure 3). On November 23, 2023, the 60th anniversary of this event was celebrated and it took place in the so-called hospital on Łąkowa Street in Gdańsk, where the first historic operation took place (Figures 4–6). Arche Hotel Uphagen House is currently located at this place, however, it has been renovated preserving all historical details of the previously operated hospital,

and at every step the interior design reminds of the great history of this location. One of the special guests of the event was Prof. Grażyna Świątecka — the first, long-term Head of the 2nd Department of Heart Diseases of the Medical University of Gdansk, which was separated from the 3rd Department of Internal Diseases in 1992 at the hospital in Łąkowa Street. In 2004 the headquarters of the 2nd Department of Heart Diseases moved to Dębinki Street in Gdańsk, and the clinic changed its name to the currently in force — the 2nd Department of Cardiology and Cardiac Electrotherapy. Professor Grażyna Świątecka, awarded the Saint Wojciech's Medal (honorary award of the Gdansk City Council) and the White Eagle Order, was to celebrate her 90th birthday a few days later. During the anniversary evening, at the Arche Hotel Uphagen House, a memorial site for former cardiologists was ceremonially opened, old photographs of distinguished doctors were hung on the walls, including those showing Dr. Wojciech Kozłowski and of course Prof. Grażyna Świątecka and her team from the 2nd Department of Heart Diseases of the Medical University of Gdansk. A showcase has appeared which will be a mini-museum of our clinic. Old pacemakers, and cardioverter-defibrillators (ICD), as well as a blood pressure monitor, and a needle for lumbar puncture of the famous Professor Mieczysław Gamski, former head of the 3rd Department of Internal Diseases are presented on the display. During the ceremony Professor Grażyna Świątecka recalled important events from the history of the clinic. She recalled the creation in October 1994 of the first Polish magazine devoted to the field of cardiac electrotherapy, the quarterly "Electrophysiology and Pacing of the Heart". In 1999, the magazine changed its name to "Folia Cardiologica", and in 2006,



Figure 1. Professor Zdzisław Kieturakis



Figure 2. Doctor Wojciech Kozłowski



Figure 3. Professor Mieczysław Gamski



Figures 4 and 5. Guests at the ceremony of 60th anniversary of the first pacemaker implantation (photo by Sylwia Mierzewska)



Figure 6. Professor Grażyna Świątecka, Professor Ludmiła Daniłowicz-Szymanowicz, Professor Ewa Lewicka during the anniversary (photo by Sylwia Mierzewska)

the editor-in-chief Grażyna Świątecka was replaced by Prof. Wojciech Zaręba from Rochester (US). In 2007, the journal changed its name to “Cardiology Journal”, which became an international title, published only in English. In this historic hospital, in 1999 under the supervision of Prof. Świątecka, the first Polish recommendations on heart pacing were developed. During the ceremony an archival film was presented showing how pacemakers were implanted in the early 1970s. Additionally, an old pacemaker with “fixed ventricular rate” from the years 70^s was presented to the audience — nowadays it is shown to medical students during classes. It is unusual: transparent, you can see the entire amazing structure, it looks as if its elements were embedded in amber. A work of medical art! Over time, it will also return to the mini-museum in Arche Hotel Uphagen House. It is also worth mentioning that the hotel is now situated on Zdzisław Kieturakis Street. The first pacemaker in the world constructed by the engineer Rune Elmquist was implanted on October 12, 1958 by Dr. Ake Senning from Sweden. Already 5 years later, this innovative method appeared in Poland, and at that time it was a really serious, complicated procedure that required a thoracotomy and exposing the heart — because the pacing electrodes were sewn directly onto the heart. It was undoubtedly a milestone in the development of cardiology! It is worth emphasizing that it all started in Gdansk, thanks to the daughter of the first patient who worked in Polish Ocean Lines and had tight connections with Sweden. The indication to implant the pacemaker was 3rd degree atrioventricular block with episodes of asystole. The next year after implantation the pacemaker had to be replaced 3 times due to battery depletion. Warsaw introduced pacemakers’ implantations 3 years later. Prof. Grażyna Świątecka greatly promoted cardiac electrotherapy. In the years 1992–1998 she chaired the board of Cardiac Pacing and Clinical Electrophysiology Section of the Polish Society



Figure 7. Doctor Mieczysław Mirowski

of Cardiology. During her presidency, a lot of events worth mentioning happened in this field. In July 1995, the first implantation of an ICD with a transvenous electrode in Poland was performed at Łąkowa hospital. The method of terminating dangerous ventricular arrhythmias by ICD was introduced by a Polish Jew, Mieczysław Mirowski (Figure 7), who was a student of the Gdańsk *Alma Mater* for a year in 1946. Then he immigrated to Israel, France,



Figure 8. Professor Andrzej Lubiński and Doctor Rajmund Wilczek

and finally to the United States of America and, as a doctor, began working on the construction of a small device that, when implanted in humans, could interrupt, for example, ventricular fibrillation. In 1980, the first ICD in the world was implanted in the United States. In Poland it was done 6 years later in Katowice by Prof. Maria Trusz-Gluza and Prof. Włodzimierz Kargul in the 1st Cardiological Department led by Prof. Leszek Giec, and again it was an open-heart procedure. Doctors from Gdańsk (Prof. Andrzej Lubiński and Dr. Rajmund Wilczek, **Figure 8**) were the first in Poland to implant an ICD with a transvenously inserted electrode. This special evening recalled many important events from the history of cardiac electrotherapy in Poland.

Article information

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