

Barbara Werner, MD, PhD (1924–2022) In memoriam

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Barbara Werner née Szurig was born on April 10, 1924 in Warsaw (Figure 1) [1, 2]. Before World War II, she graduated from the renowned Słowacki Secondary School for Girls. During the war, she continued her education at clandestine courses for physicians under the aegis of the Private Vocational School for Auxiliary Sanitary Personnel of Doctor Jan Zaorski (subordinated to the clandestine Council of the Faculty of Medicine) of the University of Warsaw.

After the war, she completed her medical studies at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Warsaw, graduating from it in June 1947 and receiving her medical diploma in 1949.

After completing her internship at the surgical ward of the hospital in Płońsk, she took up a job as a volunteer and fellow at the surgical ward of the Institute of Tuberculosis in Warsaw led by prof. Leon Manteuffel-Szoega. During her 26 years of work at the Institute, she went through successive steps of her

professional career, from the post of teaching assistant to the Head of the Department of Surgery.

In 1953, she completed first-degree, and in 1960 second-degree specialty training in surgical diseases, and in 1961 she completed specialty training in thoracic surgery. She was among the first female cardiac surgeons in Poland. She participated in many pioneering heart surgeries.

On October 7, 1966, she was awarded the title of Doctor of Medical Sciences on the basis of a dissertation entitled: "Surgical treatment of constrictive pericarditis (based on the experience with 100 pericardiectomies)".

In the years 1973–1980, she worked at the surgical ward of the Hospital at 17 Kasprzaka St. in Warsaw; from July 1975, she was its Deputy Head. From December 1980 until her retirement, she worked at the Institute of Cardiology in Warsaw as the Deputy Head of the 2nd Department of Cardiac Surgery headed by Professor Waław Sitkowski.

She was an active member of the Warsaw Medical Society and the Polish Society of Cardiology. She was a co-author of scientific publications on the cardiosurgical treatment of constrictive pericarditis and mitral stenosis published in the *Kardiologia Polska* (*Polish Heart Journal*).

Barbara Werner had a beautiful war record [1–4]. She was a sanitary instructor of the Union of Polish Youth Future "Pet", then she served as a liaison officer in the Assault Groups of the Grey Regiments in the Warsaw District of the Home Army. From September 1943, she was a soldier of the "Zośka" battalion of the 2nd Rudy Company; her pseudonym was "Basia". She took part in the first assault of the battalion, codenamed "Wilanów", in the autumn of 1943, as a liaison officer of the



Figure 1. Barbara Werner

commander Władysław Cieplak, pseudonym “Giewont”. During the assault, she was apprehended while carrying a gun by a German patrol. She saved herself by jumping into a moat in the courtyard of the Wilanów Palace [2, 3].

She participated in the Warsaw Uprising as a liaison officer of the legendary Andrzej Romocki “Morro” [1, 2, 4]. She took part in battles in Wola and the Old Town as a rifleman in the ranks of the “Broda 53” Regiment of the Home Army Grouping “Radosław”. On 19 August 1944, she was seriously wounded. Treated at the hospital at Miodowa St., she miraculously survived bombardment of this insurgent hospital.

After the war, just like other soldiers of the “Zośka” battalion, she was victimized by the security services. She refused to collaborate despite the threat of being taken to the Vistula embankment “from which you could take a good jump into the river” [5].

She devoted herself to her work and family. She married Andrzej Werner, a maxillofacial surgeon and a Home Army soldier. They raised two sons, Stanisław and Jan.

Until the last moments of her life, she was interested in the achievements of modern medicine. She participated in the activities of medical societies, gave interviews, and took part in ceremonies commemorating the Warsaw uprising.

For her merits during World War II, she was honored with the Cross of Valour, the Cross of the Warsaw Uprising, and the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. She also received the *Digno Laude* Medal: “To One Worthy of Glory”, which is awarded by the Warsaw Medical Society and the Association of Warsaw Insurgents to recognize soldiers of the Insurgent Sanitary Service for their outstanding bravery and sacrifice [1, 2].

Barbara Werner died on March 23, 2022. She was buried at the Old Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw.

She will always remain in the memory of those who knew her as a righteous and modest person, a charismatic doctor dedicated to her patients, a beloved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother.

For me, she was a model of patriotic attitudes and professional commitment, and also my best friend.

Article information

Conflict of interest: None declared.

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