

IN MEMORIAM

**PROFESSOR WIESŁAW MAGDZIK, MD
– NESTOR OF POLISH EPIDEMIOLOGY
(1932 – 2015)**

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On 29 November 2015, in Warsaw died Professor Wiesław Magdzik MD, a prominent epidemiologist, former Director of the National Institute of Hygiene (NIH), greatly meritorious for substantive improvement of the standards of sanitary-epidemiological service in Poland. For many years,

he was on the editorial board of the journal *Przegląd Epidemiologiczny* (Epidemiological Review).

Wiesław Magdzik was born in Warsaw on February 1, 1932 in a family of high school teachers. In 1950 he graduated from Stefan Batory high school in Warsaw. He obtained Diploma of Physician in 1956 after medical studies at the Sanitary-Epidemiological Section of the Medical Academy (Medical School) in Warsaw. Even before graduation was employed at the National Institute of Hygiene at the request of professor Jan Kostrzewski, the founder of the Department of Epidemiology.

In the period from October 1958 to October 1960 he served, as sanitary inspector at the Ministry of Interior. From November 1960 to February 1962 he was employed as an epidemiologist at the District Sanitary-Epidemiological Station in Warsaw. At this period, in 1961 he obtained degree of specialization in epidemiology. In 1962, he took the post of the Head of the Central Sanitary and Epidemiological Columns within Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

Since August 1965, until his retirement professor Magdzik was employed in the Department of Epidemiology at the National Institute of Hygiene. At the period 1970-1978 he was seconded to the Ministry of Health where finally he served as the Director of the Department of Sanitary Inspection.

In 1979 following the retirement of professor Jan Kostrzewski, he was offered by the Director of the

National Institute of Hygiene, professor Włodzimierz Kuryłowicz, position of the head of the Department of Epidemiology there.

In the National Institute of Hygiene, in addition to directing the Department of Epidemiology in 1980-1981, he served as deputy director of the NIH managing the Microbiological and Epidemiological Division of the Institute, and since March 1981 to the end of 1990 he was the Director of the NIH.

As the head of the Institute he summed up the results of the implementation of the Inter-MR-12 Programme “Effects of environmental pollution on human health and life,” coordinated by the NIH in 1976-1980. In 1986-1990 he oversaw the implementation of the Central Research and Development Plan CPBR 11.12: “Preventing the adverse health effects of environmental pollution of man”.

Very prestigious and time consuming task to supervise the implementation of these programs did not prevent him to put in order the internal affairs of the Institute. The most urgent was to ensure the material condition of the Institute, especially the poor state of aging buildings requiring immediate repair, including the roof structure. For the time of renovation some departments and laboratories had to be moved from the premises belonging to the NIH, while maintaining their services and scientific activities. It required very difficult logistical operations.

In these improvised conditions, to the surprise of the supervisory authorities for NIH, the Institute has complied with the scheduled work. Despite numerous difficulties - eg. renovations had to take into account requirements of the conservation officer - the renovation was finished successfully in planned term. All the units returned to the former premises.

Wiesław Magdzik considered as his duty to continue the founding mission of the Epidemiology Institute established in 1918 as a center for research and training for sanitary and epidemiological services of the country. Therefore, he promoted close cooperation between the

National Institute of Hygiene and Sanitary-Epidemiological Stations across the country. Institute developed opportunities for colleagues from the regional institutions to specialize in the field of epidemiology, hygiene, and in public health. The Institute has organized training courses, and internships. It also prepared course materials and books. Wiesław Magdzik has proven himself in many fields of work - but above all he was an epidemiologist. Besides a specialization in epidemiology also obtained a specialization in infectious diseases. In 1965 he defended his doctoral thesis: "Controlled vaccination against typhoid. Epidemiological evaluation of comparable groups of individuals vaccinated with various vaccines" under supervision of Professor dr Jan Kostrzewski. Habilitation (dozent degree) he obtained on the basis of the dissertation: "Epidemiological evaluation of the consequences of viral hepatitis" from the NIH Scientific Council in March 1971.

In this paper W. Magdzik showed that the prevention and control of hepatitis in Poland was inefficient and required a fundamental change. The concept of improving this situation presented later in the project "The prevention and control of hepatitis in the years 1976-1980". The program submitted to the Department of Sanitary Inspection of the Ministry of Health has been subject of a broad debate among specialists. In February 23, 1973 government approved the program to be implemented in the country. Implementation of the practical application of this program in Poland contributed over several years to reduce the incidence of hepatitis B by more than thirty percentage points. Recognition of the results of W. Magdzik in the field of prevention of hepatitis prompted WHO to use his experience in setting program for prevention of hepatitis A and B in Mongolia between 1979 and 1990.

As an epidemiologist practitioner he took part in the field control of various epidemics in Poland and abroad. Of particular importance was his participation in the control of the epidemic of smallpox in Gdansk in 1962. and in Wroclaw in 1963. In 1974. participated on behalf of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO) in the program of smallpox eradication. He worked in the state of Bihar, in the districts of Hazaribagh and Dhanbad. In 1976 WHO awarded to him the Medal of the Bifurcated Needle.

In his lifelong career as an epidemiologist he was particularly interested in the problems of immunization - therefore also took a large part in the implementation in Poland vaccination against poliomyelitis. In 2001 he published book "The eradication of poliomyelitis - implementation and perspectives". In 2002 he took part in the conference organized at the NIH 8.10.2002 r. on the occasion of the signing of the certificate of eradication of poliomyelitis in the European Region in Copenhagen on 21.06.2002 r.

At that time W. Magdzik published article "Possibility of smallpox reemerging as the result of bioterroristic attack" in *Przegląd Epidemiologiczny* 2002;56, Suppl.3, pp. 5-11.

One of his former graduate students (W. Magdzik supervised 8 doctoral theses) still working at the station of Sanitary-Epidemiological Inspection summed up briefly this activity: "*he realized the importance and executed the use of cold chain distribution of vaccines and raised effective sterilization to the rank of a leading problem within health care system – it was the key to improve the epidemiological situation of infectious diseases in Poland*".

In recent years, often we hear the term - translation, translator – to define the person who brings to the public in an understandable way the specialized research results, sometimes very sophisticated studies of a fundamental nature. Such an ability to translate had Wiesław Magdzik. He used them for the purpose to help people working in prevention of infectious diseases in local posts to acquire that knowledge in a form available to them. As an example may serve the following elaborations: "Information about the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome AIDS", 1984 (co-author A. Nowosławski), "Spongiform encephalopathy prion diseases in humans", 2001 and "Is there a risk related to protein BSE prion" (co-author J. Ślusarczyk).

Wiesław Magdzik published 240 works, of which 46 concerned immunization. Many was devoted to the introduction of new vaccines, discussed the issue of safety of vaccinations and potential adverse effects. On the initiative of W. Magdzik the collective book "Vaccinology" was published in 2005. It was edited by W. Magdzik, D. Naruszewicz-Lesiuk and A. Zieliński. Its expanded and updated second edition was published in 2007. Also on the initiative of W. Magdzik and edited by him was "Prevention of and control of infectious and parasitic diseases" 1982. Out of 7 subsequent editions, first 5 were edited by W. Magdzik, the last one in 2004.

Particularly noteworthy is the book collectively edited by J. Kostrzewski, W. Magdzik and D. Naruszewicz-Lesiuk: "Infectious diseases and their control on Polish territory in the twentieth century" issued by PZWL in 2001. This is the last book, which involved participation of professor J. Kostrzewski.

In 2002, Wiesław Magdzik retired from his main place of employment - the NIH. But in this same year in September, was hired by the University of Antwerp for the International Team set up by the European Commission to develop rules of conduct diseases control against hepatitis A and hepatitis B. The Team was active until August 2005. By the end of the academic year 2009-2010 W. Magdzik lectured in School of Arts and Sciences in Kielce and in the King Władysław Jagiełło School of Public Health in Lublin.

In 2010, professor W. Magdzik had an accident, the consequences of which have resulted in difficulties in walking, which markedly reduced his activities and caused his withdrawal from active participation in the teaching.

In 2006, he published retrospective vision of his professional life in memoirs „My flirt with medicine”.

How W. Magdzik was perceived in the Institute, which bound his professional life over many years of fruitful work? Professor Jan K. Ludwicki stated in the laudation at a meeting of the Scientific Council of the NIH, on October 11, 2005: *“But for us, I mean the staff of the National Institute of Hygiene and also myself, the most important was the work of Professor Wiesław Magdzik as Director of the National Institute of Hygiene in perhaps the most difficult period of the Institute, except for the Second World War, ie. in 1980-1990. In the dark days of martial law and ubiquitous repression Professor Wiesław Magdzik managed with remarkable agility to protect acting NIH underground solidarity against repression. I know well that the experience of this period was for Professor very bitter and not by all properly appreciated.”*

Professor Wiesław Magdzik died suddenly on November 29, 2015. The funeral Mass was held on December 9, 2015 in the Church of St. Stanislaus Kostka in Zoliborz - after which the ashes were placed in the family grave at the Municipal Cemetery North in Warsaw, Poland.

On behalf of the staff and the Scientific Council of the NIH farewell speech delivered professor Mirosław Wysocki, director of the NIH. In his final statement he said: *“He was a friendly to people, good colleague who respected people, helped and supported them with the advice - but mainly mobilized colleagues to find their places in the profession and in the community. Certainly, in this regard, he passed with the highest grade exam as a student of Professor Jan Kostrzewski. From now his person and his work at the National Institute of Hygiene is a history - but history, which includes prestige both of our Institute, and of the entire epidemiological service in the country. Professor, buddy, friend you will remain in our memory. We bid farewell: Wiesław Magdzik, rest in peace.”*

