

HISTORY OF THE MEDICINE

From the history of neurology in Slovakia

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According to archive sources, neurology in Slovakia started to develop in the first half of the past century. It was determined by two important events – the constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, and the foundation of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Bratislava in 1919. In the new state, for the first time in their history, the Slovaks were given the access to national university education and the opportunity to develop science in Slovakia. The history of the first Department of Neurology of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University as well as neurology in Slovakia started on September 21, 1919 and was assigned to prof. MUDr. Zdeněk Mysliveček, a professor of psychiatry and neurology. The further heads of this department were prof. MUDr. Miroslav Křivý, prof. MUDr. Stanislav Krákora. They devoted their scientific work to the problems of neuropathology, neurohistology, etc. Their department successors, professors Karol Matulay and Jozef Černáček were Slovak physicians. Prof. Černáček focused his work on the problems of neuroinfection, its resulting conditions and the dominance and interaction of the hemispheres. Prof. Matulay devoted his attention to epileptology and rehabilitation in psychiatry. Owing to their merit the neurological clinics engaged experts that were starting to grow in Slovakia, who were educated at the Faculty of Medicine in Bratislava. Owing to the merit of Dr. Závodný in Nitra, Dr. Gašpar in Levoča, Dr. Matis in Trenčín, Dr. Hympán in Košice, Dr. Trávník in Martin and others, neurology has developed in Slovakia. The development of neurology was supported substantially by the foundation of the second Faculty of Medicine in Košice in 1948. Both faculties helped in the education of experts and in the improvement in health care in this sphere, scientific research, postgraduate education, as well as in contacts with foreign experts. The treatment of neurological diseases contributed to the gradual improvement of health in the Slovak population. (*Ref. 6.*)

Key words: neurology, history of neurology in Slovakia, history of Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Bratislava.

Currently, neurology in Slovakia represents a highly developed branch of medicine which reflects the latest knowledge and has achieved major success in the diagnostics, treatment, prevention, scientific research, and education of professionals. However, the route to the present reality was not easy and direct. Many obstacles had to be overcome, as well as many professional, economic, social, philosophic and ethical problems.

According to archive sources, neurology in Slovakia started to develop in the first half of the past century. It was determined by two important events – the constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, and the foundation of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Bratislava in 1919. The constitution of the Czechoslovak state meant a radical change in the life of the Slovak nation in all its spheres. It was particularly reflected

in health service that was built, so to say, on a “green field”. The health state of the population was very poor. The population was afflicted by epidemics – plague, cholera, varicella, and whooping cough. The country lacked doctors, health professionals, health care facilities, secondary schools and universities. There were 75 thousand people per one doctor, and in some regions there

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was no physician at all. Morbidity and mortality rates were very high. The social and economic conditions of the population were below the acceptable standard. Health education was neglected and the low standard of hygiene was alarming. Generally, most health services were provided by general practitioners in small towns and rural areas. There were very few specialists working in the region.

The constitution of the first Czechoslovak Republic gave rise to substantial changes in the health service in Slovakia already in the early years of its existence. They were governed by the Ministry of Health and Physical Education that realised that it was impossible to resolve the complex problems in Slovakia without their own generation of physicians and nurses. It was decided to found a Czechoslovak State University in Bratislava. The project was realised in the autumn of 1919. The university was established in Bratislava, and its first faculty was the Faculty of Medicine. However, Slovakia lacked qualified experts to work at the newly formed Faculty. Therefore, this task was taken by eight Czech physicians – professors who were sent to Bratislava by the Ministry of Health.

One of them was Dr. Zdeněk Mysliveček, a professor of psychiatry and neurology. He was authorised to establish a department of psychiatry and neurology at the Faculty. Thus, in the context of the historical circumstances, the history of the first Department of Neurology of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University as well as neurology in Slovakia started on September 21, 1919. In the new state, for the first time in their history the Slovaks were given the access to national university education and the opportunity to develop science in Slovakia.

The Department of Psychiatry and Neurology of the Faculty of Medicine of the Comenius University was situated in the premises of the Bratislava State Hospital in Mickiewiczova Street No. 13, and it belonged to the first departments of the newly established Faculty. Professor Zdeněk Mysliveček became the first head of the Department. At the time of its establishment, it was the only specialized centre for the whole territory of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. Its beginnings were difficult and complicated. It had to overcome problems associated with personnel, premises, and finances. The Department consisted of two wards: neurological and psychiatric. Both of them comprised male and female wards. In addition to Professor Mysliveček, three lecturers and two clinicians worked at the Department. The building up of the Department was a demanding task, and the workload of the doctors was immense. Each of them had to take care of 40 and more in-patients, in addition to out-patients. Examinations, observations, and treatment of patients were time-consuming activities. As the Department lacked the professional staff for biologic, chemical, and histological examinations, these jobs were performed by doctors. In the early years, for example, they also had to serve meals to the patients. Another problem arised from the aggressiveness of psychiatric patients, who made it difficult for female personnel to work there. As to the technical equipment, one X-ray machine was available. On top of work at the Department, the doctors had to work at their surgeries, fulfil their faculty tasks, and were supposed to work scientifically. Many

of them were engaged in different professional medical associations and devoted their time to health education. Professor Mysliveček together with his colleagues, engaged themselves in the improvement of the conditions of their workplace and its development. At the same time he tried to develop also the scientific work, and encouraged other doctors to do the same. He dedicated himself to the problems of neuropathology, neurohistology and psychiatric diseases interrelation. His well-known works are: *Special Psychiatry* (1949), *Psychiatry* (1956), *General Psychiatry* (1959). In addition to the post of the head of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology, Prof. Mysliveček affected significantly the history of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University as its dean (1924–1925) and the vice-chancellor of Comenius University for science and research (1925–26). He was also one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Medical Society of J.E. Purkyně and for some period also its head. In 1924, under his chairmanship, the Department held the first nationwide work meeting of neurologists and psychiatrists that started the later tradition of nationwide neurological-psychiatric congresses.

During his ten-year activity at the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University, he educated a number of young experts in the field of neurology and psychiatry in Slovakia, who later became the heads and senior consultants of some of Slovak workplaces of this specialization. Owing to his involvement, the neurological-psychiatric wards were established gradually in all regional hospitals. Some of his former students worked there, e.g. Jozef Závodný, MD, in Nitra, František Gašpar, MD, in Levoča, Ignác Matis, MD, in Trenčín, Jaroslav Hympán, MD, in Košice, Karol Trávník, MD, in Martin and many others. Prof. Mysliveček can be justly considered as the founder of Slovak neurology and psychiatry. He was one of the first doctors who developed Slovak medicine in the first years of its institutionalization (1919–1930). Also the other doctors who moved Slovak neurology and psychiatry ahead, worked together with Prof. Mysliveček at the Department. Among them: A. Pekelský, E. Jandová-Radimská, B. Bazal, J. Keller, A. Fabián, F. Šalša, V. Dzurek, I. Matis, J. Mrázová, H. Wágnerová-Hátriková, J. Kresáková, J. Prokop, F. Gašpar, Z. Klimo, B. Desperátová, B. Adler, K. Tildy, Š. Králik, J. Rapp, H. Lászlová, J. Černáček, J. Kmeť a J. Dolinský.

After Prof. Mysliveček had left for Prague in 1930, Prof. Miroslav Křivý, MD, became the head of the Department and led it up to 1936. Being a graduate of the Prague neurological school, he made himself a reputable neurologist and psychiatrist. In his scientific work he was engaged in the problems of biology of cerebrospinal fluid. He wrote a number of scientific papers on neurology, liquorology, histopathology, psychopathology and forensic psychiatry. He was also interested in socio-psychiatric problems. During his activity at the Department, the situation improved as far as the technical equipment and personnel. In spite of this, the number of doctors was still below the optimal state. The in-patient department could not meet the hospitalisation requirements.

After Prof. Křivý had left, the post of the head of the Department was given to the Associate Professor Stanislav Krákora, MD, the former assistant to Prof. Mysliveček, who had been

working there since 1920. One of the students of Prof. Křivý, Prof. Karol Matulay, MD, was one of the first graduates of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Bratislava and belonged to the first generation of the Slovak doctors, who were gradually engaged in scientific and academic posts at the Faculty. Prof. Matulay took his degree in 1930 and he started to work at the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology straightaway. After the leave of Prof. Křivý in 1939, Prof. Matulay as an associate professor in psychiatry and neurology, was charged with leading the Department.

His permanent study, tenacious and conscientious work at the Department, inventive scientific and educational activities gradually led to his appointment as the first Slovak professor of psychiatry and neurology.

At that time he was the only Slovak doctor with such high qualification in this scientific discipline. As the first doctor in Czechoslovakia he performed cerebral angiography, and under his management, electroconvulsive treatment was put into practice at the Department. Under his administration, great attention was paid to the treatment of psychoses. Professor Matulay replaced the passive care by active therapy. He was markedly engaged in the fight against epilepsy, and drug addiction, as well as in taking care of the defective youth. Owing to his engagement, psychiatry and neurology were lectured at the Faculty of Medicine of the Comenius University also during the hard war years. He investigated the training of specialists in psychiatry and neurology at the Department. The training lasted for five years. The specialists left for practice at new neurological and psychiatric departments in Slovakia. Via the professional medical journal – Bratislava Medical Journal – that had been established in 1921, the department informed about new findings in Czechoslovakia and abroad. Academic contacts, primarily with Czech medical faculties, as well as with neurological and psychiatric centres abroad were kept. The best known scientific works of Professor Matulay include: *The Direct Posture of Human Beings* (1939), *The Electro Narcosis* (1956), *The Treatment of Syphilis of Nerves by Penicillin* (1957), *The Mental Retardation* (1972).

In the years 1939–1945 the following doctors worked at the Department: J. Černáček, J. Kmeť, J. Dolinský, J. Hympán, T. Mikeska, K. Trávník, J. Torok, H. Babčanová and D. Zachar.

In 1950 the time common neurological and psychiatric workplace was divided into two separate clinics. The post of the head of the Neurological Department was held by Professor Jozef Černáček, MD, DSc, a Slovak neurologist who had graduated at the Faculty of Medicine of Charles University and its famous neurological school. He had been trying to develop the Department and make it independent since 1946. Owing to him, the development of Slovak neurology was carried on in contiguity with European knowledge, and gradually started to achieve comparable achievements in prevention, diagnostics, treatment, training of experts, as well as in academic activities. It enabled the introduction of electrodiagnostic examinations, establishment of clinical laboratories as well as personnel development of the workplace. In addition to the common X-ray techniques, pneumoencephalography with small air filling, routine percutaneous brain

angiography, dynamic examination of the spine, and tomography were performed. The liquor laboratory was enriched by the method of electrophoresis, and the biochemical laboratory was established. In 1955 Professor Černáček became the head of the Department of Electrophysiology of the Nervous System at the Institute of Normal and Pathologic Physiology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The Department was allowed to use also this workplace. At that time the Department had 66 beds, a surgery with 1300 patients monthly, antineurotic and antiepileptic consulting rooms. Professor Černáček was a guarantee of scientific research, which was focused on clinical electrophysiology with electroencephalographic and electromyographic specialization, on neuroradiology and neuroinfections. He himself was mainly occupied with neuroinfection and its subsequent stages, by dominance and interaction of hemispheres. In addition to many other works, he wrote a well-known textbook titled *Neurologic Propedeutics* (1955). By means of undergraduate and postgraduate studies, his Department educated dozens of new researchers and neurologic doctors who were gradually employed by neurologic in- and out-patient clinics all over Slovakia. The cooperation with academic centres abroad was developed and broadened. Prof. Černáček was the vice-chairman of the World Neurological Federation and one of the most reputable neurologists in the Central Europe.

The development of neurology in Slovakia considerably influenced the constitution of the second medical faculty in Košice in 1948. The neurological and psychiatric workplace was led by Professor Zoltán Klimo, MD, who had graduated at Bratislava Faculty of Medicine. Education of other specialists in neurology had a widening effect on neurologic care in western and middle Slovakia. Later, the important posts were held by Prof. Hympán, and Associate Professors Trebula and Eiben. Under the leadership of Professor Hympán, the department made a significant progress. Currently, the department is managed by Professor Eiben.

The establishment of the Department at the Jessenius Faculty of Medicine in Martin, forming a part of Comenius University was also an important achievement. It was founded by Associate Professor Trávník, and its development was supported and assisted by the members of the 1st Neurological Department in Bratislava, notably Prof. Bartko, Balek, MD, Varsik, MD, Traubner, MD.

After the leave of Prof. Černáček in 1975, Professor Daniel Bartko, MD, DSc. became the head of the Department of Neurology of the Faculty of Medicine, Comenius University in Bratislava. Owing to him, the research in the field of pathophysiology, diagnostics and therapeutics of vascular cerebral lesions, neuroimmunology, neuromorphology were developed. A number of new laboratories were established, e.g. neurochemical, liquorologic, vegetative system examination laboratory, laboratory of vertebrogenic diseases and the ultrasound station. The Department initiated the so-called programme diagnostics that enabled to complete the examination of acute neurological patients within three hours after their admission. Prof. Bartko, a highly regarded expert in neurology, is the author of numerous mono-

graphs, textbooks and studies on neurology. Under his administration, the department became a reputable diagnostic, therapeutic, scientific and academic workplace. He also paid his attention to the aesthetic cultivation of the ambience. Thanks to his efforts, the Department is known as one of the most beautiful ones within Bratislava University Hospital.

The November 1989 events aroused radical changes in the whole society and had an effect also on the Faculty of Medicine, Comenius University. In the formidable revolutionary period, after the leave of Prof. Bartko, Professor Pavel Traubner, MD, PhD, became the head of the Department and has been leading it up to the present. He graduated at the Faculty of Medicine in 1964 and has been working at the Department since 1966. His scientific work is focused on brain and spinal cord vascular diseases, ultrasound diagnostics, multiple sclerosis, dementia, vertebrogenic diseases. In addition to scientific research and clinical practice, he pays a great attention to the education of undergraduates. He established his own scientific school and participated in qualifying advancements of numerous graduates, assistant professors and professors. Prof. Traubner is the initiator of the use of Doppler ultrasonography in neurological diagnostics in Slovakia and that of ultrasound for medical purposes in the former Czechoslovak Republic. He is the author or co-author of 201 remarkable national and international scientific publications, academic study materials and textbooks on neurology. He favoured the development of the Department not only as its head but at present also as the Dean of the School of Medicine, Comenius University in Bratislava. He makes every endeavour to ac-

quire advanced technical equipment for the department, as well as appropriate premises, and especially a scientifically and ethically highly advanced staff. He supports international activities of the Department and its members. Owing to Prof. Traubner's enthusiasm the reputation of the Department is significantly growing. He himself is a member of numerous professional neurological societies and editorial boards in Slovakia and abroad. Prof. Traubner's unselfish work has been appreciated many times. He has been awarded for example the State prize of Pribina Cross of the second class "For outstanding medical, pedagogic, scientific and social activities" (2001), Ján Jesenius golden honorary plaque of the Slovak Academy of Sciences "For merits in medical sciences" (1998), the national prize "Crystal Wing" (2001), Dérer's Medal of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic "For lifelong activities" (2000).

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Received November 19, 2002.

Accepted December 9, 2002.