

OBITUARY

Professor Irena Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz (1917-2015)



*“The End is as invisible as the Beginning”**

In the early morning of 7th July 2015, the Secretary of the Neuromuscular Unit, Mrs Ewa Witkowska, received a call from a daughter of our Professor – Prof. Marta Petrusewicz, informing her of the death of her mother.

For a few months in the empty room of the Head of the Warsaw Neuromuscular Unit, the box fixed on the 7th July on the calendar remained immobile and unchanged.

Now, seven months after the death of Prof. Hausmanowa, when her room has at last been reorganised and refurbished, the feeling of emptiness grows with each passing day.

The small gallery of portraits of the Prof. Hausmanowa’s friends and teachers has now been transferred to the Lecture Hall of our Institute.

Every morning, also including the dark and cold winter ones, Prof. Hausmanowa was in her room at 7.00 a.m. She liked very much these times first thing mornings without the ringing phone, when she could work and contemplate in the silence. Then – when – the phones did indeed started to ring, the Professor deployed that special patience and kindness of hers to talk with the mothers of sick children. And some of them were inclined to call very regularly.

Every Tuesday, the Professor would run consultations with the patients coming to the Neuromuscular Unit from all parts of Poland. It was an honour for us working at the Unit to see and be part of this, and a special lesson in medicine to learn how Professor Hausmanowa would deal with the sick, often having to communicate with them diagnosis of a severe disorder. From her we learnt the art of talking to patients. The patient was always the centre of attention for the Professor and the scientific issues were always closely linked with the clinical, which Professor Hausmanowa strived to understand and solve, using all available scientific methods.

For more than 60 years, Professor Hausmanowa developed the modern science of neuromuscular disorders in Poland, starting from morphology, through biochemistry, and electrophysiology, to genetics. Professor Hausmanowa possessed a special ability to connect narrow scientific disciplines, and deploy them correctly solving the problems of the particular patient.

The total sum of her papers covering a wide spectrum of the neurological sciences are brought together in no fewer than 13 volumes.

Publications she paid particular attention to were new editions of the *Polish Handbook on Neuromuscular Disorders* first coming out in 1967. And indeed, the new editions of *Choroby nerwowo-mięśniowe* under her editorship kept on appearing, every couple of years.

The Professor was a pioneer of clinical electrophysiology in Poland, and a handbook of hers dealing with this subject was also published. She was also a pioneer implementer of genetics in the neurological clinic. And every year thanks to Professor Hausmanowa, we were able to host the outstanding experts in the field of neuromuscular disorders. We thus, had direct access to the latest scientific achievements, and to their authors.

Professor Hausmanowa always discussed with us the plans we had for papers to be presented during neuromuscular conferences. Equally, the name-days of members of the team were never forgotten, and those that happened to fall in spring would be graced by sprigs of flowering lilac for the celebrants from the Professor's garden. Here also was a person of unusual self-deprecation and a very original sense of humour!

Just one month before death, she came to the Neuromuscular Unit for the last time to consult with the patients.

In 2004, at one of the aforementioned name-day gatherings, she presented one of us with the book *Roman Triptych*, as authored by His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

And in the chapter Apocalypsis of the poetic *Roman Triptych* there is a sentence: "And yet I do not altogether die, what is indestructible in me remains"*.

Andrzej Kochański
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* John Paul II: *Roman Triptych Meditations*, translated by Jerzy Peterkiewicz, Wydawnictwo Literackie Kraków 2003.



Prof. Irena Hausmanowa and her working group.