

NON OMNIS MORIAR

IN MEMORIAM PROFESSOR MARIA DAŃSKA (20.07.1921 – 20.07.2014)

Professor Maria Dańska, PhD (*hab.*), MD, was a specialist in oncological pathomorphology. Her life-long passion was tumour diagnostics, and she is unanimously acclaimed as an icon of Polish pathomorphology. Professor Maria Dańska was born in Brodnica on 20 July 1921. She died on 20 July 2014, having lived for 93 years. During WWII, she was involved in the underground independence movement in Warsaw. She fought in the Warsaw Uprising as a member of the Polish Home Army. After the war, she took up studies at the Medical Academy in Gdańsk. She developed her knowledge of pathomorphology first by studying in Gdańsk under the guidance of Prof. Wilhelm Czarnocki and then at the Institute of Oncology in Warsaw. In 1957, Prof. Maria Dańska completed a six-month internship under Prof. Rupert Alan Willis, a renowned oncopathologist, at the University of Leeds. In later years, as an experienced oncological pathomorphologist, she was received with the highest honours at medical universities in London, Stockholm, Bonn, Rochester and Stanford. In the 1980s, after the proclamation of the martial law in Poland, Prof. Maria Dańska decided to emigrate. At first, she lived in Germany and then moved to the USA. At the age of 85, she returned from Florida to Warsaw [1]. Until the end of her life, she was keenly interested in new developments occurring in both interrelated medical fields: pathomorphology and oncology.

Professor Maria Dańska worked at the Department of Tumour Pathology at Warsaw's Institute of Oncology, where she accumulated knowledge in the field of oncological histopathology. Her mentor was Prof. Józef Laskowski. It is under his guidance that she learnt to diagnose tumours and link microscopic features to clinical manifestations. Professor Maria Dańska contributed to expanding a new field within pathomorphology, termed "histoklinika" ("histoclinical analysis"), which was pioneered by Prof. J. Laskowski and heralded the future emergence of an internationally recognized branch of pathology called surgical pathology. While working at the Institute of Oncology, Prof. Dańska continued to climb the scientific career ladder, gradually earning the academic titles and degrees of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor (docent) and Professor. In recognition of her extensive scientific contributions and organizational skills, Prof. Tadeusz Koszarowski appointed Prof. Dańska to the position of Head of the Department of Pathology. She was at the helm of the Department of Tumour Pathology in 1970-82. Thanks to her great personal commitment, the Department of



Tumour Pathology at the Institute of Oncology based in Wawelska Street in Warsaw became a reference medical and educational centre specializing in oncological histopathology for pathomorphologists and oncologists from all over Poland. Training courses for pathomorphologists organized by Prof. Maria Dańska always demonstrated a high standard of scientific merit. They were attended by successive generations of medical practitioners specializing in pathomorphology who had an opportunity to gain up-to-date practical knowledge in the field of oncology. Professor Maria Dańska, together with assistants from the Department of Tumour Pathology, was also involved in the training of physicians specializing in oncology.

Although she spent most of her working time at her microscope, she was never far away from her patients. She was in constant contact with oncologists, becoming familiar with clinical data, endoscopic and radiological findings and other relevant information about the progression of the disease process in individual cases. Behind every microscope slide, she saw a patient waiting for her diagnosis which determined the choice of a treatment method. Professor M. Dańska was a member of an interdisciplinary diagnostic and therapeutic team which, at the time, represented an advanced therapeutic approach developed at the Institute of Oncology. One of the forms of clinical pathological consultations were so-called "fireplace meetings" attended by all physicians, taking place twice a week. Each case was presented and discussed by Prof. Maria Dańska or other members of the Department of Tumour Pathology. This form of consultations and mutual education was continued in subsequent years under the watchful eye of Prof. Andrzej Kułakowski. Professor Maria Dańska made a large contribution to the development of cytology in the diagnostics of tumours, and to the introduction of this method at the Institute of Oncology in Warsaw. Today, pathomorphologists who were trained by her are experts with extensive knowledge in their field.

Throughout her work at the Institute of Oncology in Warsaw, Prof. Maria Dańska made herself known as a brilliant, intelligent and elegant woman who always resolved substantive, scientific and organizational problems with a lot of tact and caution. Her professional accomplishments were linked to the period of expansion of the Department of Tumour Pathology at the Institute of Oncology in Warsaw between the 1960s and the 1980s. Professor Maria Dańska diagnosed tumours, investigated their histogenesis, and published pioneering reports about

them in international medical literature. In 1969, she published a paper in the international journal "Cancer" [2] and a monograph in the Polish Academy of Sciences in which she studied 52 cases of a previously undiagnosed or misdiagnosed tumour collected at the Institute of Oncology at Wawelska Street in Warsaw. The tumour was later called "the Dabska tumour" in her honour. The Dabska tumour is a very rare tumour of soft tissues that occurs mainly in children on the limbs, within the head, neck, testicles or in other sites, in a dermal or diffuse form. The tumour is usually benign, and can be treated by surgical resection. Despite being named in English as malignant endovascular papillary angioendothelioma, the tumour has been known since then as "the Dabska tumour" [3]. Another pioneering pathoclinical and radiological description concerned aneurysmal bone cyst (ABC) and was included in the publication authored by Prof. Maria Dąbska and Prof. Buraczewski in 1969 [4]. In 1977, on the basis of 10 case reports, Prof. Maria Dąbska finally introduced the term *parachordoma* [5] (the tumour was first described by Laskowski under the name of *chordoma periphericum* in 1951). An equally important contribution made by Prof. Dąbska to the development of Polish oncology was her characterization of dermal lesions, particularly originating from skin appendages, such as *keratoacanthoma* [6], *ecrine spiradenoma* and basal cell carcinoma. In another study, Prof. Dąbska discussed a melanocytic skin lesion of the Spitz nevus type. She characterized the lesion in 1956 on the basis of 23 cases (the original paper authored by S. Spitz was based on 13 cases and was published in *Am J Pathol* in 1948), describing in detail different cellular variants of the nevus [7]. Other achievements of the Polish researcher were in the field of soft tissue and bone sarcomas. A tumour termed *aponeurotic sarcoma* was described in Polish scientific journals: originally by Laskowski in 1961 [8], and then by Dąbska – in 1973 [9]. The sarcoma was concurrently described by Enzinger in 1970 under the name of epithelioid sarcoma. Other studies, based on Prof. Dąbska's work as a pathomorphologist-diagnostician were concerned with bone tumours [10-13], and contained pathomorphological descriptions of these tumours, complete with electron microscopic studies of their ultrastructure.

Professor Maria Dąbska was actively involved in the organization of the Polish Society of Pathologists and was devotedly interested in its activities until the end of her life. She had a considerable impact on the development of oncological pathomorphology, and contributed to establishing the status of pathomorphologists in oncology. Professor Dąbska is the most experienced and internationally acclaimed Polish pathomorphologist honoured with a medical eponym [14]. She is the only woman among Polish pathomorphologists, and one of few worldwide, to occupy

a prominent place in the history of medicine. The best proof for that claim is the 2011 publication in "Human Pathology" [14].

Professor Maria Dąbska is an honorary member of the Polish Society of Pathologists and an honorary member of the Polish Society of Oncology.

On the occasion of the National Independence Day celebrations on 11 November 2012, President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski awarded Prof. Maria Dąbska a Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in recognition of her accomplishments in the field of science and research, her teaching activities, her outstanding role in the development of medical sciences in Poland and internationally, and her contribution to building the foundations of Polish oncology.

Unfortunately, I never had an opportunity of cooperating with Prof. Maria Dąbska. In 1982, when I started working for the Department of Tumour Pathology at the Institute of Oncology in Warsaw, she was no longer employed at the Institute.

However, utmost respect for Prof. Maria Dąbska, as well as fond memories of her, will always remain in us.

References

1. Historia. Strona internetowa Wspólnoty Mieszkańców przy ul. Marszałkowskiej 68/70 w Warszawie. www.marszalkowska.eu. [dostęp 14.05.2012].
2. Dabska M. Malignant endovascular papillary angioendothelioma of the skin in childhood. Clinicopathological study of 6 cases. *Cancer* 1969; 24: 503-510.
3. Schwartz RA, Dabski C, Dabska M. The Dabska tumor: a thirty-year retrospect. *Dermatology* 2000; 201: 1-5.
4. Dabska M, Buraczewski J. Aneurysmal bone cyst. Pathology, clinical course and radiologic appearances. *Cancer* 1969; 23: 371-389.
5. Dabska M. Parachordoma: a new clinicopathologic entity. *Cancer* 1977; 40: 1586-1592.
6. Dabska M. Keratoacanthoma. *Wiad Lek* 1965; 18: 1249-1250.
7. Dabska M. Melanoma juvenile. *Nowotwory* 1956; 6: 103-112.
8. Laskowski J. Aponeurotic sarcoma. *Pol Med J* 1971; 10: 1-11.
9. Dabska M, Meyza J, Nowacki M. Sarcoma aponeuroticum (sarkoma of the aponeurosis). *Pol Tyg Lek* 1973; 15: 99-102.
10. Dabska M, Huvos AG. Mesenchymal chondrosarcoma of the young. *Virchows Arch A Pathol Anat Histopathol* 1983; 399: 89-104.
11. Sieiński W, Dabska M. Osteogenic sarkoma according to the materials of the Department of Pathology of the Warsaw Oncological Institute for the years 1948-1977. *Nowotwory* 1979; Suppl: 35-46.
12. Dabska M. Osteogenic sarcoma and its morphological "masks". *Nowotwory* 1979; Suppl: 35-46.
13. Pietrow D, Jeziorska M, Dabska M. The usefulness of electron microscopy in the diagnosis of some selected cases of soft tissue tumors. *Acta Med Pol* 1979; 20: 449-450.
14. Schwartz RA, Janniger EJ. On being a pathologist: Maria Dąbska – the woman behind the eponym, a pioneer in pathology. *Hum Pathol* 2011; 42: 913-917.

Prof. Anna Nasierowska-Guttmejer

President of the Polish Society of Pathologists
Head of the Pathomorphology Department, Central Clinical
Hospital of the Ministry of Interior in Warsaw