Middle Articles

MEDICAL EDUCATION

Polish School of Medicine University of Edinburgh, 1941-49

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Edinburgh University celebrates on 4 and 5 June the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation there in 1941 of the Polish School of Medicine. Between 100 and 200 Polish doctors connected with the Polish School will be meeting again in Edinburgh for a commemorative ceremony. Altogether 337 students have passed through the School, of whom 228 qualified M.B., Ch.B. An honorary degree is to be bestowed on the last of the Polish Faculty's three Deans, Professor J. Rostowski. His account of how the Polish Medical School came to be set up in Edinburgh is printed below.

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Twenty-five years ago, as the German Army raced westwards in the brilliant summer of 1940, the Polish Army was evacuated from France to Scotland. Among the members of its medical service were professors, readers, assistants, and specialists from nearly all the faculties of medicine in Poland. And so became possible a situation that has been described as unprecedented in the history of universities—the establishment in 1941 in the University of Edinburgh of a Polish Medical Faculty, governed by Polish Acts on Academic Schools, having the right to confer Polish degrees, and with its own professors teaching in their native tongue.

The Faculty was set up at a time when all scientific life in Poland was being systematically destroyed, universities had been closed down, and their professors executed or imprisoned in concentration camps. Poland was subjected to this form of terror more perhaps than any of the countries overrun by the Germans. In the words of the German Governor-General it was intended that Poland should become "an intellectual desert."

It was at that dark hour for Poland that the University of Edinburgh offered to its Polish colleagues the opportunity to resume research and to teach Polish students. Twenty-five years have passed, and it seems worth while to recall the circumstances in which this generous gesture was made.

After the Polish Army had been evacuated from France to Scotland, it was thanks to the efforts of Colonel I. Fortescue, Medical Liaison Officer with the Polish Army in Scotland, that arrangements were made with the Polish military authorities to attach Polish professors, lecturers, and specialists to

various British military hospitals in Scotland. Among these was the Military Hospital at Edinburgh Castle, where the Commanding Officer was Lieutenant-Colonel F. A. E. Crew, then Professor of Animal Genetics in the Faculty of Science and a member of the Medical Faculty of Edinburgh University. It was he who first conceived the idea of a Polish Medical School, which would be authorized to grant degrees recognized by the Government of Poland. His proposal won the approval of the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Professor Sydney Smith, who from that moment till the closure of the School was its patron and enthusiastic protector.

With the approval of the Polish Prime Minister, General W. Sikorski, an Organizing Committee was then set up under the chairmanship of Professor A. Jurasz, who was to be the School's first Dean. Finally, on 24 February 1941 a formal agreement on the establishment of a Polish Medical Faculty was ratified between the University of Edinburgh and the Polish Government.

Constitution and Organization

By virtue of its Constitution the School was to be "an Academic School as defined by the Polish Acts on Academic Schools of 15th March 1933." The curriculum, standards of teaching, and examinations were to conform to the regulations which had been in force at the medical faculties of Polish Universities before the outbreak of hostilities. This article of the Constitution was of the utmost importance, as it established the Polish Faculty of Medicine as a Polish Academic School within the University of Edinburgh. To the Polish people in exile this was an event of great consequence, and was recognized

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by them as a most generous act of hospitality. The School was to be subject to the supervisory control of a Faculty with a Dean in whom the powers of a Rector Magnificus (Principal) were to be vested. The election of the Dean was to be the prerogative of the Faculty.

Some difficulties were encountered, however, by the Organizing Committee in appointing the teaching staff, particularly in finding Polish professors for certain Chairs, and it was decided that those Chairs which could not be filled by Polish professors would be filled by professors of the respective subjects in the University of Edinburgh, who would become members of the Faculty of the Polish School of Medicine.

The first Polish members of the Faculty in 1941. (Left to right) Reader Dr. Elektorowicz, Professors J. Rostowski, A. Jurasz (Dean), J. Fegler, L. Lakner, and T. Rogalski.

When it was completed in 1941–2 the Faculty consisted of Professor L. S. P. Davidson, Professor A. M. Drennan, Professor J. Fegler, Professor R. W. Johnstone, Professor A. Jurasz, Professor W. Koskowski, Professor L. Lakner, Professor T. J. Mackie, Professor G. F. Marrian, Professor C. McNeil, Professor B. Nowakowski, Professor T. Rogalski (Dean from 1945–6), Professor J. Rostowski (Dean from 1946–9), Professor Sydney Smith, Professor A. Straszynski, and one representative of the Docents. In the course of time the Faculty was joined by Professor J. Dadlez, Professor R. W. B. Ellis, Professor R. J. Kellar, and Professor J. R. Learmonth.

Inauguration

The inauguration ceremony was held on 22 March 1941. The President of the Polish Republic, the Lord President of the Council, representatives of the Polish Government, British and Polish military authorities, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and City Councillors were among those present. After the Vice-Chancellor's opening address the President of Poland, Mr. W. Raczkiewicz, formally pronounced the establishment of the Polish School of Medicine. At this ceremony the University of Edinburgh conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on the President of the Polish Republic.

Polish Medical Faculty Gets Under Way

The first academic year was particularly arduous for both students and staff, as the work of a full academic year had to be carried out in the period from March to September.

As early as December 1941 four students were able to graduate with the M.B., Ch.B. of the Polish School. The

Polish degrees were conferred at the University graduation ceremony and the graduates solemnly declared the oath before the Dean of the Polish Faculty, who personally presented the Diplomas.

Four normal academic years followed until the end of the academic year 1944–5, which marked a turning point in the history of the Polish School of Medicine. When the war in Europe ended it was agreed that the activities of the School should be gradually reduced and that there should be no further admissions of new students.

The number of medical students in the University of Edinburgh had considerably increased by 1946, and it became exceedingly difficult to accommodate the Polish students, especially those in the third year. It was finally agreed that the Edinburgh Medical Faculty should admit ten students, and the remaining 23 were admitted to other Schools in the United Kingdom. Fourth- and fifth-year students were allowed to complete their studies at the Polish Faculty. All those who had graduated from the Polish School were, under the Medical Practitioners and Pharmacists Act, 1947, entitled to registration as medical practitioners in the United Kingdom.

Closing of Polish Medical Faculty

The gradual liquidation of the School started in 1946, and was completed in March 1949, when the School closed down.

The last act which closed this unique chapter in the history of the Edinburgh University took place on 15 November 1949, when, as the last Dean, I unveiled in the presence of the Principal of the University, Sir Edward Appleton, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Sir Sydney Smith, the graduates and the staff of the School, and Scottish and Polish guests, a plaque commemorating the Polish School of Medicine (see Fig.), in the quadrangle of the University New Buildings (now called the University Medical School Buildings).

If I may be permitted to quote myself, I should like to recall what I said at the end of my address:

"It was a deep desire both of the students and the teaching staff to set up a lasting sign of our gratitude in the form of a memorial plaque, and we are indebted to the University Court for permission to set it up on the walls of this famous University. May this Memorial tablet be also a symbol of the everlasting friendship between Britain and Poland, a friendship which was strengthened by the creation of a Polish School on Scottish soil. It is with the wish that this Alma Mater Academica Edinburgensis should flourish for centuries to come that I unveil this plaque."

During the existence of the School from 1941 till 1949 the teaching staff consisted of 15 professors, 27 senior lecturers, and 37 assistants; in all they published about 100 papers. The School possessed a library which, when the School closed down, contained 1,076 books. Those books which had been bought by the Polish Government were sent after the closure of the School to the University of Warsaw and the remainder was taken over by the Polish Library in London.

The Summing-up

It is not inappropriate now, after 25 years, to review the results of the generosity of the University of Edinburgh and of the efforts of the teaching staff of the Polish School.

Altogether 337 students passed through the School, of whom 228 qualified M.B., Ch.B. Nineteen graduates obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) after submitting a doctor's thesis. Thirty-three third-year students and five fourth- and fifth-year students were admitted to other British universities. Seventy-one students discontinued their studies for various reasons. Two students died.

Of the 228 graduates 20 returned to Poland. Over 100 graduates now work in Great Britain as general practitioners

or as consultants or medical officers in hospitals. Nearly 50 settled in Canada and the U.S.A. Some of them took up an academic career in North America, and eventually became associate professors. Five work in Africa in newly independent Commonwealth countries, five in Malaysia, five in Australia, one in New Zealand, three in the West Indies, and three in France. Eighteen graduates have died—a high mortality rate, considering that they were relatively young.

Five Polish professors of the School have died. Two professors live in Poland, one in Great Britain. Eight lecturers and five assistants have died, eight have returned to Poland. Some of the others have emigrated to the U.S.A. The rest live in Great Britain.

The creation of the Polish School of Medicine within the University of Edinburgh was a fine example of cooperation between nations in the academic sphere. It is to be hoped that such cooperation will not remain unique in the history of medicine, even though one must also hope that the need which gave rise to it will never be experienced again.

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Memorial tablet unveiled in the quadrangle of the University Medical School Buildings.

The photographs were provided by the author and by the Polish Library, London.

Medical Literature Retrieval

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An extensive knowledge of the literature is regarded by most researchers as a prerequisite to starting any kind of research work. It is also necessary for the practising physician if he is to keep up to date with treatment and care of patients. However, it is no longer possible to devote sufficient time to reading to keep abreast of the material published in any one field, however circumscribed. Although the number is not definitely known, each year at least four thousand medical periodicals are published, and new ones are appearing daily. Sir Theodore Fox¹ called his Heath Clark lectures "Crisis in Communication," and in them he examined closely the problems facing those concerned with the dissemination of medical information. Discussing the needs of the medical reader, he pointed out that his attention had first to be drawn to the existence of the material through abstracts, review journals, regularly issued bibliographies, and other methods, and then once a particular publication has been brought to his notice it should be readily available to him for use at his desk or laboratory bench.

Computer System

Some years ago the National Library of Medicine in Washington decided to overhaul the methods used in compiling the *Index Medicus*. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century it has kept the world informed of the output of medical literature month by month until in 1961 each issue contained references to more than 10,000 articles. Out of this study has come the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval

System (Medlars), which uses a Honeywell 800 computer to process, sort, and print out the material which forms each issue of *Index Medicus*. The computer also stores the information on magnetic tape which can be used to satisfy search demands.

At the National Library of Medicine it was thought likely that a bottle-neck might occur if all requests for bibliographies and literature searches were to be handled at one place, so copies of the tape have been made available to several other centres in the U.S. Largely through the initiative of Professor G. A. Smart, the Newcastle upon Tyne Faculty of Medicine decided that steps should be taken to see if the National Library of Medicine would allocate a tape to Newcastle to enable literature searches to be undertaken in this country. The project was enthusiastically welcomed by Professor Page, Director of the Computer Laboratory in Newcastle, and eventually it was announced in April 1965 by the Secretary of State for Education and Science that a Medlars service would be set up in Newcastle upon Tyne for an experimental period of three years. The University would receive a grant of £26,000 for its share of the work, and the National Lending Library for Science and Technology at Boston Spa would collaborate with the University Library on the library aspect of the project, Dr. A. J. Harley being seconded for this purpose. The time since then has been spent in preparing for the operation, which has just started.

Technical Aspects

The technical aspects of the project have recently been described by Harley and Barraclough.² Dr. Harley, of the

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