



Olgierd Narkiewicz (1925 – 2010)

Olgierd Narkiewicz, an eminent Polish anatomist and neurobiologist, died in Gdańsk on October 9, 2010. Narkiewicz has been born in Vilnius on October 21, 1925. During all his scientific career (1946–96) he worked at the Medical University of Gdańsk, advancing all the way from assistant to full Professor and Head of Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology. In the years 1996–2010 he was Emeritus Professor at the Department. Narkiewicz was honored with Membership of the Polish Academy of Sciences (1991–2010) and Honorary Memberships of the Polish Anatomical Society, Polish Neuroscience Society and Bulgarian Anatomical, Embryological and Histological Society.

Olgierd Narkiewicz was a descendant of Samogitian nobility, whose family seat was the ancestral property Szołpiany located in Taurage County of Lithuania that is well known to Polish readers of Sienkiewicz's „Trilogy“. It was the Narkiewicz family's habitat since sixteenth century. Olgierd Narkiewicz was born to Anna Umiastowska and Dr Adolf Narkiewicz, a well-to-do medical doctor. His father was a district physician, and for a time the chief physician in Vilnius. The initial education of Olgierd Narkiewicz began in Vilnius, where he attended the famous Gymnasium „Sigismund Augustus“ before the Second World War. In 1939, before the outbreak of war, he passed to the third grade of high school. He did the so-called „small high school diploma,“ during the Soviet occupation of Vilnius, obtaining the School Graduation Certificate on secret teaching courses. It is worth mentioning that among his teachers at that time were Prof. Stanislaw Hiller and Prof. Stanislaw Stomma. During WWII Narkiewicz participated in resistance movement. As he spoke five languages, he used this knowledge making reports from radio Allies communications for the underground press. Patriotic activity of the family led to repressions: his father - was arrested in 1941 by Soviets and died in prison in Gorky. Prof. Narkiewicz's uncle - Franciszek Umiastowski was killed in Katyn. In 1944, after re-occupation of Vilnius by the Red Army, Narkiewicz was forced to hide in a psychiatric hospital. With skilful simulation and kindness of Polish doctors, including then Associate Professor Janina Hurynowicz he managed to avoid being deported to the Soviet Union.

After the war he was in the first group repatriated from Vilnius to Lodz, then to Lublin, where he started studying at the Faculty of Medicine of the newly established university – M. Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, where he scored the first year. In 1946 Narkiewicz decided to move and continue his medical studies at the Medical University of Gdansk (MUG), and was accepted in the second year by Prof. Michał Reicher as a research student in the Department of Anatomy and continued medical studies in the years 1947–50 at the MUG Faculty of Medicine. During studies he obtained a position of younger assistant in the Department of Anatomy and participated in research on primates, the favourite object of his teacher. Since 1952 he worked as an assistant, receiving the Doctoral degree submitting the thesis entitled „Structure and variation of human splenius muscles“. In 1954 he was appointed assistant professor and in 1960 he received the title „doctor habilitatus“ (dozent) for his scientific achievements and dissertation „The arterial segments of kidneys“. In 1971 he was nominated an associate professor, and in 1979 – full professor.

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Advance of Prof. Narkiewicz in the scientific hierarchy was crowned with granting him the position of the Head of his parental Department that he chaired in the years 1964–96. During his term he transformed the department of Anatomy into the Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology. Under his leadership this department developed a leading position in Poland and significance in the international science. Studies on the structure and function of the nervous system were his particular achievement. While doing the fundamental studies in neuroanatomy using modern methods, he extended his interests to clinical neurology, specializing also in that discipline (1959). At that time Narkiewicz prepared also a new neuroanatomy handbook in Polish, modernizing one written by another important scientist Prof. Różycki.

Olgierd Narkiewicz received scientific training in many famous foreign centers (USA, United Kingdom, Norway, Germany), but the greatest impact on the course of his scientific career had the research internship, which he held as a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (1962–1963), under supervision of Prof. Jerzy Rose. Narkiewicz was visiting professor several times at the Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities (USA), where he closely cooperated with Prof. Henry Wiśniewski. Among teachers who especially influenced his scientific life Prof. Narkiewicz always treasured the memory of Prof. Michał Reicher, his first teacher; of Prof. Jerzy Rose, a leading U.S. neuroanatomist and neurophysiologist; and of prof. Jerzy Konorski from the Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology in Warsaw, creator of the famous school of neurophysiology, with whom prof. Narkiewicz closely collaborated for a long time.

The rich scientific output of Prof. Narkiewicz is containing more than two hundred publications (approximately 100 of them are original papers), in which neuroanatomical themes dominate. In this field, he is undoubtedly a leading scientist in Poland and is ranked high among the world neuroanatomists (he was cited approximately 400 times), enjoying recognition in the scientific circles of Europe and the USA. Prof. Narkiewicz created a school of anatomy, whose achievements are known and respected in the world. His research concerned the study of:

- Structural and functional organization of cortical connections with the subcortical centers
- Claustral connections – claustrum-cortical neuronal loop
- Synaptic ultrastructure of subcortical centers (mainly claustrum and the amygdala)
- Cholinergic centers and their connections within the limbic system
- Afferent connections of the frontal cortex and the amygdala
- Location and dynamics of pathological changes in the limbic system in the course of physiological aging and Alzheimer's disease.

In all these areas, Prof. Narkiewicz has made genuine discoveries that have significantly enriched the neuroanatomical knowledge. Especially noteworthy is his influence in the research on the claustrum, which role in the organization of the brain was not yet sufficiently studied. Until the 60's this structure was treated as a "marginal" subcortical center, whose importance not only was not known, but it did not aroused much interest.

Among many studies that established Prof. Narkiewicz's international recognition, worth mentioning is pioneering research into connections of the neocortex and claustrum described by him in 1964 as claustrum-cortical neuronal loops. These discoveries became a global achievement. In further studies he showed that there is a topographical differentiation of cortico-claustral connections, and that particular cortical areas (responsible for perception of a given modality) have their representation in particular areas of the claustrum. We can safely say that the studies of Prof. Narkiewicz opened new perspectives on structural and functional organization of the brain. The research activities of Professor Narkiewicz did not stop when he retired and a school created by him continues his line of research. Under supervision of Prof. Narkiewicz seven researchers successfully obtained habilitation, and then became Professors at different universities.

Professor Narkiewicz's teaching program requires a separate discussion. He was a brilliant lecturer. Students awarded him many times the title of the "Teacher of the Year". He transformed teaching of the classic gross anatomy into a comprehensive approach, taking into account the functional and clinical aspects. As the first one in Poland he introduced teaching clinical anatomy and neuroanatomy with the essential elements of neurobiology. Just like in the U.S. and majority of the Western European countries, neuroscience is the basis of neurological disciplines. Prof. Narkiewicz transformed teaching of anatomy in Poland from purely descriptive-mor-

phological into modern functional anatomy, adapted to clinical problems. Another example of Prof. Narkiewicz crucial influence on the training of thousands of medical and dental students in Poland is his contribution in academic books. Neuroanatomical chapters in two most popular handbooks of anatomy in Polish, the “Human Anatomy” edited by Bochenek and Reicher, as well as in the handbook of Prof. Sokołowska-Pituchowa were written by Narkiewicz. In 2003 he was a coauthor of “Clinical and functional neuroanatomy” and finally in 2010 he published with his coworkers a new updated version of “Human Anatomy”.

Professor Narkiewicz was very active also as scientific organizer. In the years 1967–70 he was deputy dean of the Faculty of Medicine, in the years 1970–72 - the dean. On both of these positions, as well as during teaching activities he had wonderful contact with young intellectuals. This was evident in his active involvement during students’ strikes in 1980. Through many terms he was a member of the Senate of the Medical University of Gdańsk. In 1991 he was elected a corresponding member of the Division VI of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS) and then its full member. In 1992–98 he served as deputy Chairman of the PAS Gdańsk Branch, and then was a member of the Presidium of the Branch and a member of its Disciplinary Committee. He served in several committees of PAS, as the Committee for Physiological Sciences (1988–97), Committee of Neurological Sciences, and Committee of Neurobiology (1999–2010).

Prof. Narkiewicz was a member of Scientific Councils of numerous scientific institutions, such as the Ministry of Health (1974–76), Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology in Warsaw (1966–2010), Center for Experimental Medicine and Clinical Sciences (1991–2010), and finally - the Institute of Biogenic Amines (1999–2010). Prof. Narkiewicz belonged to numerous scientific societies in Poland and abroad. He served as President of the Board of the Polish Anatomical Society and received honorary membership of this organization, as well as the Bulgarian Association of Anatomists, Embryologists and Histologists and Polish Neuroscience Society. His work also includes active participation in the editorial boards of three scientific periodicals: *Folia Morphologica*, *Acta Neurobiologiae Experimentalis* and *Advances in Cell Biology*. He was awarded many scientific prizes, including: Team Awards of the Secretary of Polish Academy of Sciences (1974, 1977, 1981, 1987) and the Hevelius Scientific Prize of the President of the City of Gdańsk (1995). Prof. Narkiewicz received numerous Polish state awards, including Officer’s Cross of the Polonia Restituta Order and Medal of the National Education Commission. With all the outstanding achievements of prof. Narkiewicz placing him in a row of genuine scholars, he was not a “bronze figure of Professor” closed in the “ivory tower”. Being a very cheerful and open personality, Prof. Narkiewicz was a popular and loved member of society. What characterized him always was his immense curiosity of the world, passion for exploration of the unknown and remarkable sense of humor. He was an excellent skier, a passionate canoe tourist and also a charming bridge partner. In his youth, he practiced mountain climbing. In his last years prof. Narkiewicz’s favorite retreat was a cottage in the nearby Kashubia region from which he made many trips and excursions on the lake Wdzydze.

We shall remember Professor Olgierd Narkiewicz for his passion of life, kindness and true care of people, his influence on the training of thousands of medical and dental students in Poland, for his knowledgeable contributions to research and for his commitment to education. He is survived by his wife Mirosława née Broda, whom he married in 1953., son Krzysztof and two grandchildren.

Janusz Moryś
Przemysław Kowieński
Sławomir Wójcik
Jerzy Dziwiątkowski

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