

In memory of Professor Andrzej Szczeklik

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Andrew Szczeklik visited the Hochgebirgsklinik Davos for the first time in 1978. At that time, the clinic was the largest center for chronic obstructive lung diseases in Western Europe. The cold war was still on. Professor Szczeklik, upon invitation by Christian Virchow Sr managed to attend the first of a series of focused meetings devoted to intrinsic asthma and especially aspirin-induced asthma. He thanked for the invitation to the first meeting “looking forward to a fruitful co-operation”, which indeed became true. At that time, leukotrienes had recently been discovered and Bengt Samuelsson was about to receive the Nobel Prize for this in 1982. In addition to leukotrienes, platelet-activating factor (PAF) and prostanoids were the most relevant and up-to-date molecules in the research on the pathogenesis of asthma. This was a puzzling field and new to many. Professor Andrew Szczeklik was invited to these meetings because of his recent publications with Professor Ryszard J. Gryglewski who both succeeded to publish science of highest quality despite the political and economic challenges in their country at that time.¹ The common interest in the conundrum of aspirin-sensitivity, which Andrew Szczeklik and Christian Virchow Sr at the Hochgebirgsklinik Davos Wolfgang shared², led to a number of mutual projects as well as the establishment of a protocol for inhaled aspirin challenge,³ which is still used worldwide, including the Department of Pneumology in Rostock, Germany. Andrew Szczeklik's relentless interest in scientific progress led to several collaborations including an often cited multicenter study investigating the hypothesis whether food additives might cross-react with aspirin in aspirin-sensitive asthma.⁴ This study precluded the myth that tartrazine was in fact a trigger for aspirin-sensitive asthma, a notion held until then. The study included 156 patients, not only from Germany but also from Poland and Italy, which were contributed by Professor Sebastiano Bianco from Milan. The main reason for this finding was the strict enforcement of the concept of double-blind challenge,⁴ a method which was not unanimously accepted at the time but suggested by Andrew Szczeklik who understood the large variability of symptoms in aspirin-induced reactions but also in aspirin-tolerant

patients. Andrew later co-organised a number of meetings held in Davos together with Christian Virchow Sr. Andrew's excellent network helped to attract not only the relevant leaders in the field, but also helped to identify future talents. His name, however, also attracted a large audience at each one of these meetings. He personally contributed to these conferences with numerous lectures. He also brought an aspiring, lovely, young lady from his laboratory with him who impressed everybody with her excellent clinical research in the field of aspirin-sensitive asthma and with her language skills. Her name was Ewa Niżankowska-Mogilnicka who under Andrew's supervision became a world-known leader in the field, too. Andrew initiated international research programmes and published many articles that are of relevance today. Some were written together with Donald Stevenson, another icon in aspirin-asthma research who first described aspirin desactivation and also visited the Davos meetings. Andrew Szczeklik's interest in platelets and their relation to asthma led to another publication⁵ that resulted from a longer stay in Davos with his family. In 1987, he was present (in full gear as a physician!) when Richard von Weizsäcker, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany visited the Hochgebirgsklinik in Davos. The last publication coauthored by Andrew Szczeklik and Christian Virchow Sr was in the field of IgG subclasses, namely IgG-4.⁵ Following the retirement of Christian Virchow Sr, this collaboration unfortunately ended. Andrew Szczeklik continued to publish an enormous amount of literature in the field, which was inspirational for a large number of scientist, young and old. His hypothesis of a viral origin of intrinsic asthma is not disproven today and remains vibrant. His interest in international research increased even further with the fall of the iron curtain when travelling from and to Poland became easier. With his European network on aspirin-induced asthma he organised regular meetings in the beautiful historic city of Krakow, to which Christian Virchow Jr, then researching the clinical effects of leukotriene-receptor antagonists^{7,8} was invited and has returned several times. Andrew Szczeklik was always a wonderful host but also a wonderful guest. He could fascinate large crowds with his enthusiasm, and

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his positive attitude towards almost everything. His anecdotes from the intellectual fight with the communist regime in everyday life but also in the cabaret are legendary. Good vodka and science was not exclusive for Andrew, and listening to his wisdom and his experience was always enlightening. It was a wonderful pleasantly surprise to see such an inspiring person come from behind the walls that divided Europe once and to work hard to overcome this divide, long before anybody dreamed of this really happening. It has been a great pleasure and privilege to know Andrew Szczeklik and it is with great sadness that his enthusiasm and friendliness will not be around anymore. The last advice he gave me when I asked him about the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial he told me I should not go there: "It will only make you sad" he said. Instead of visiting this place of the most monstrous atrocities, I should much rather go and see the Collegium Maius, the historic building of the University and the Medical Faculty and admire the origins of science and culture in this place. I did follow his advice and can only pass it on. At my first visit to this Collegium, there was no picture of Andrew but I am sure next time there will be one. He deserves to be listed among the greats of Krakow.

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