

10th death anniversary of Professor Andrzej Szczeklik: his impact on *Pol Arch Intern Med* (*Pol Arch Med Wewn*) and beyond

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Dear Readers, Dear Colleagues!

February 03, 2022 was the 10th death anniversary of Professor Andrzej (Andrew) Szczeklik. His unexpected passing was a great loss to the Polish research community and our journal. Since 2007, when *Polskie Archiwum Medycyny Wewnętrznej* (*Pol Arch Med Wewn*), a monthly, peer-reviewed official journal of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine, founded in 1923, changed the publisher from the Urban Partners to *Medycyna Praktyczna* and the editorial office was moved to Kraków, being hosted by the Department of Internal Medicine at the Jagiellonian University School of Medicine, A. Szczeklik took the lead of the National Scientific Board of the journal and recommended its international members from among his collaborators and friends. As a vice-editor-in-chief, supported by Ms. Renata Zaręba, I dug up manuscripts listed in a huge submission book, covered with undecipherable, hand-written notes, and stored in boxes containing folders with submitted materials, made phone calls to authors asking whether after several months they would still be interested in publication of their work, and struggled each month to collect at least 2 original articles for the next issue. The beginning of my editorial adventure was quite discouraging, though our ambition was to turn the respected Polish periodical into an international journal with an Impact Factor. A. Szczeklik was the only one who indeed believed this plan was feasible within a few years. The verb “to believe” is the best word to express the essence of his unshakable trust and support against all odds, despite a paucity of at least moderate-quality articles and language editing challenges. When Thomson Reuters initiated the evaluation of our journal to calculate the first Impact

Factor, sceptics dominated, but A. Szczeklik said that this value would exceed 1.0. And we did it! The first Impact Factor of *Pol Arch Med Wewn* announced in June 2012 was 1.346, and 2 years later it was 2.052. He was the father of this unexpected success.



FIGURE 1 Professor Szczeklik at the intensive care unit, 2nd Department of Internal Medicine, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Krakow, 1990s

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FIGURE 2 Doctor honoris causa in Warsaw, 2002. Professor Szczeklik receives the honorary degree; on the left – Professor Franciszek Kokot



When I decided to reject a growing number of submitted articles without review, several authors wrote angry letters and expressed their disappointment over the phone. A. Szczeklik supported this strategy for the sake of our journal. He also suggested new formats, in particular research letters after suspension of case reports, in order to enable publication of preliminary interesting data or case series of patients with rare diseases. He also opted for making the title of our journal “more international” and changing it to *Polish Archives of Internal Medicine* (*Pol Arch Intern Med*), which was implemented 5 years after his death.

A. Szczeklik was an eminent scientist and passionate physician. He was the chairman of the Department of Allergy and Immunology of the Academy of Medicine in Kraków from 1972, and in 1989 he became chairman of the Department of Medicine. He was elected the Rector of the Copernicus Academy of Medicine in Kraków in 1990, and then Vice-Rector of the Jagiellonian University Medical College (1993–1996). He authored or co-authored 441 papers indexed on PubMed. These were investigator-initiated studies, not huge multicenter randomized trials or registries, in which a true contribution of 10–20 authors or more is hard to identify. He published his research papers in prestigious journals including *The Lancet*, *Nature*, *The BMJ*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *Blood*, *Circulation*, and many others. His current h-index is 68, and his citation count, 18 745. Science, exploration, and new ideas were his *raison d'être*. He significantly contributed to the fields of asthma, in particular aspirin-induced asthma, allergy, and thromboembolism, including aspirin- and statin-mediated antithrombotic effects. He always stayed up to date with the latest research on a broad spectrum of internal medicine subspecialties. A. Szczeklik

was an inspiration for many. He used to say that an internist is like the conductor of an orchestra, while other specialists are orchestra members.

Given the fact that the predicted 2021 Impact Factor of *Pol Arch Intern Med* will achieve 4.6, I would like to thank you all—our authors, reviewers, and editorial board members—for your invaluable contribution to the journal's success. I look forward to the continued support of Polish researchers and clinicians in the years to come, so that together we continue to enhance the quality of the scientific work we publish in *Pol Arch Intern Med* as a tribute to Professor Szczeklik's legacy.

Pol Arch Intern Med commemorates Professor A. Szczeklik on his 10th death anniversary by publishing a selection of memories taken from the special issue of our journal from March 2012.

I was reading through my e-mails, as I do everyday, when I came across the incredible news: “Professor Andrzej Szczeklik died this morning”. I could not believe what I was reading as he was so fit and so active. (...) Andrzej was the prototype of a gentleman. He was extremely well educated, and one of his most important publications was the book *Catharsis: on the Art of Medicine*. This book “was the exciting product of an erudite physician who is sensitive to the nuances of his profession and to its ancient humanistic origins”. He was fluent in French and this is why I have written the title in this language. (...) what astonished me more than anything was his persistence in his thinking. He was among the first to understand that tartrazine and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents do not crossreact with aspirin in patients with aspirin-induced asthma. He was fighting “big” names in the US, but his data were absolutely correct.

Bosquet J. Adieu Andrzej, tu nous manqueras pour toujours... *Pol Arch Intern Med*. 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 19-19.

Current and future generations of Polish medical students and specialists will remember him as Editor of the very modern textbook of internal medicine, which is continuously updated with the most current scientific evidence. For some laymen, his name will be associated with the authorship of two fascinating books integrating profound knowledge on humanities, art and science into thoughtful perspectives on history, society, and above all, the life of human beings. (...) he continued to be a very active and passionate leader of the research team in Krakow that arguably is the internationally most recognized Polish centre within Respiratory Medicine and Allergology.

Dahlén S-E, Dahlén B. Professor Andrzej Szczeklik (1938–2012): a European intellectual defining aspirin-asthma and much more. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 20–22.

He was a patient in his beloved “Klinika”, the 2nd Department of Medicine of the Jagiellonian University Medical College in Kraków. “Klinika” was his brainchild and work in progress ever since the communist authorities assigned Andrzej in 1972 to the Department of Allergy and Clinical Immunology while some of us, his peers, were getting junior faculty positions in Poland and abroad. Andrzej had chosen to stay in his native Poland and by espousing the philosophy of “Organic Work” had turned around his “Post”, the old dilapidated Tuberculosis Hospital, into a modern marvel of Internal Medicine; he became its Chairman in 1989. By overcoming huge barriers, he transformed grim wards into functional patient rooms; a new wing was built with diagnostic and research laboratories furnished with the state of the art equipment; a new lecture hall and conference rooms were added, where Andrzej’s guests from European and American universities were sharing advanced concepts and technological breakthroughs.

Hawiger J. Andrzej Szczeklik: visionary, pathfinder, Renaissance man. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 23–24.

It is this remarkable dexterity as a clinical scientist paying absolute attention to experimental and analytical detail that marked Andrew out as a very special clinical scientist and in no small part is this mix of talents that enabled him to make so many contributions for patient benefit. (...) How do I remember Andrew? – a true gentleman who was both brilliant and humble, a man who expressed so much humanity; he was a friend to so many, a man who must have fought so many battles quietly and without fuss to become a true leader not only of scientists but in setting an example to inspire so many.

Holgate ST. Andrew Szczeklik: a clinical scientist of the highest calibre. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 25–26.

After the meeting, I wrote to Professor Szczeklik and proposed that we collaborate in the area of homocysteine research, particularly on the aspects involving human subjects to whom I did not have access. He responded immediately and invited me and my wife to visit Krakow and his clinic; what struck me in his response was his youthful enthusiasm. I finally met Professor Szczeklik in person at the Department of Internal Medicine in Krakow in the summer of 2000. We talked for several hours in his office on topics ranging from our scientific interests and how and why each of us embarked on

a scientific career, to medicine and issues facing physicians who want to pursue scientific research in order to understand etiology of human disease. (...) I acquired a copy of Professor Szczeklik’s book *Catharsis: on the Art of Medicine* with the Author’s dedication. While reading the book, I found several topics that we discussed during my visits. This book confirmed my original impression of Professor Szczeklik as an exceptional physician, scientist, and humanist.

Jakubowski H. From basic science to clinical medicine. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 27–28.

This friendship started in the early 1970s, when Andrew, a young doctor, worked on the diagnostic value of gamma-glutamyl-transpeptidase and cobalt activated acylase together with Dr M. Orłowski and A. Szewczuk. As I too was interested in clinical enzymology, our friendship strengthened from year to year. Beginning with 1979, he became the author of a chapter in the textbook of internal medicine, which was edited by me during the next 25 years. (...) Countless doctors, scientific workers and internists lost their teacher, who, by his personal example, showed, how to fight on behalf of common welfare, beauty, and truth in the increasingly deceitful world. Andrew was the icon and conscience of Polish medicine and especially internal medicine, which he covered with glory all over the world.

Kokot F. A painful leave-taking. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 29–30.

The name *Szczeklik* has been well known to Polish medical students for the last half of the century at least. It also applies to me. When I was a third-year medical student, one of my course requirements was to thoroughly study the basic handbook on the introduction to clinical medicine, the book on physical examination, and bedside diagnostics authored by Professor Edward Szczeklik, the father of Professor Andrew Szczeklik. (...) I was impressed and proud of great discoveries made by a Pole, Professor Andrew Szczeklik, in the area of prostaglandins and their role in the development of atherosclerosis as well as clinical application of prostacyclin. Each piece of news which was published by newspapers or broadcast by the radio or television was discussed in details in the laboratory I was working in. When I cast back my mind, I am still experiencing the same thrilling excitement we had in those days. Finally, Poles made an astonishing contribution to the world’s medicine after so many years of not being significantly visible.

Kucharz EJ. Professor Andrew Szczeklik: how I will remember him. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 31–32.

Andrew was clearly a champion for his students and he sought opportunities in the West to expand their scientific career and experience. (...) Science has no national boundaries. However, intellectual contributors may be inhibited, but not suppressed, by economic and political oppression. The maintenance of Polish academic science foundations is illustrated by Andrew Szczeklik’s efforts to support his protégés during the oppressive political environment in Soviet Poland.

Mann KG. Krakow–Vermont connection. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 33–34.

FIGURE 3 Professor Szczeklik playing his famous white piano at the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine, Kraków, 2005



Andrew became licenced to practice medicine in the UK and I suggested that he should consider staying in the West permanently. "No" he said, "I must return to Poland, no matter how difficult it is". He was a man of sensitivity in poetry and music. We went together to a Promenade concert in the Royal Albert Hall to listen to Britten's War Requiem. He had perfect musical pitch and complained that he found it painful that the composer had not resolved a particular phrase. He was also deeply understanding of art. (...) He played jazz on the piano and drank vodka but was also mystical. On a later visit to London, he lived in my house. What a pleasure it was to return home and hear Andrew playing Chopin on the piano as only a Pole can play it.

Martin J. Andrzej Szczeklik. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 35-36.

It was in 1972 when Associate Professor Andrzej Szczeklik came to Krakow to become the head of the Department of Allergology of the local School of Medicine. I joined the Department a year later and started my professional career in a small ward on the top floor of an old hospital building. The first move of the 34-year-old head of the Department was to transfer a small cellar room into a research laboratory. (...) It was (and still is) necessary to learn more complicated laboratory methodology abroad. This meant finding money for such scholarship. Again, this was a "mission impossible" if you did not have contacts in the Ministry of Health. Professor Szczeklik decided to contact a Polish researcher, who had left Poland 10 years earlier, and established himself as a chief of the lab specialized in platelet research at the Temple University in Philadelphia. The scientist was Professor Stefan Niewiarowski. He understood the problem quite well and this way in the beginning of 1979, during a snowy and cold winter, I left Poland (by plane for the first time in my life!) and landed in Philadelphia. Professor Szczeklik knew, I am sure, that this one-year postdoctoral fellowship

would not only enrich our lab with new methodology but also teach his assistants ways and means to conduct modern research.

Musial J. Talent and persistence in hard times. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 37-39.

My first meeting with Professor Andrew Szczeklik has remained in my memory to this day. It was a sunny winter day in February 1972. I was just finishing my studies at the Faculty of Medicine, being mainly interested in cardiology and internal medicine in general, and I was looking for a job at the time. Dr Jerzy Szczeklik, now Professor of Cardiology, who was a tutor of our students' scientific group, told me that his brother Andrew was going to obtain a post as Head of the Department of Allergy and Clinical Immunology in Krakow. He strongly advised me to go and meet Andrew at a job interview. "He's an extremely brilliant man" – he said. (...) I regarded the opportunity to work with him as an intellectual adventure and an extraordinary privilege. He was a very hardworking and dedicated person, who spent days and nights in the clinic. In addition to imparting his extensive medical knowledge to his students, he also taught us the importance of having empathy and showing compassion when counselling patients, some of whom were on their deathbed. As a boss, he was extremely demanding, but very helpful and willing to share his knowledge and skills.

Nizankowska-Mogilnicka E. Working alongside Andrzej Szczeklik – a lifetime to remember. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 40-41.

When I joined his team in 1995, he initiated a novel molecular biology laboratory in a modern facility building, an extension to the old community hospital on the Skawinska Street at the Jewish Quarter of Kazimierz. (...) Andrew Szczeklik equipped his laboratory with a gas chromatography–mass spectrometry instrument in 1996. The laboratory staff spent several weeks in Nashville and New York to learn the tricks and tips on measurements of eicosanoids in biological samples. The next task was to monitor changes in the profile of eicosanoids from the exhaled breath condensate during aspirin provocation. These results were collected within the last year. Although we discussed them with Andrew Szczeklik, the manuscript was published just a few days before his death. (...) Andrew Szczeklik had foreseen the need for a continuous pursuit of novel eicosanoid mediators. (...) Within the last decade he was the top one in the field of aspirin hypersensitivity and the leader in the Polish national ranking of biomedical research scientists.

Sanak M. The unfinished history of aspirin hypersensitivity – in memory of Professor Andrew Szczeklik. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 42-45.

A young medical doctor met his Polish colleague on the occasion of a symposium on aspirin-induced asthma, a distinct subgroup of that syndrome. On stage, an attractive and charming Polish professor, qualification in internal medicine, allergologist, already a name in some rare types of asthma and idiosyncrasies that I never heard about, splendid appearance, fluent English, scientific lecture of superb quality, slides of top layout and design, discussion with my Swiss colleagues in

Italian and French. He even apologized for badly understanding and not speaking German! Good joking Polish intellectual, really? My God! That's who I wanted to be when I grew up and eventually became an adult scientist. (...) Being an open-minded, helpful, and friendly character at first sight, Andrew was one of the hardest and most disciplined workers I ever saw when it came to real work. His striking ideas and many fruitful discussions always lead to a result, a project, the future. (...) science in Andrew's life was one side of the medal, the other was a man devoting himself to art, political and social affairs, and – in the last years – more and more to philosophical questions and theses.

Schmitz-Schumann M. Vinegar and willows – from aspirin to friendship. A tribute to Andrzej Szczeklik. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 46-47.

For years he had been a constant element of Krakow's life, a role model for many doctors, scientists, educators, and social workers. The candlestick on which he was placed is precarious, and a living person does not always feel comfortable in limelight. (...) For most of the people of Krakow, Andrzej was just a great doctor. People trusted in him. University professors (and their wives) called him instead of an ambulance. Many eminent, and much many more average people, were his patients. And even if their way ended in his clinic, they knew that they are passing away in the best possible manner. (...) Personally, I believe that his greatest achievement was the reunification of the Krakow Medical Academy with Jagiellonian University. This great idea, conceived by him and Ryszard Gryglewski, at that time the rector of Academy, and Aleksander Koj, the rector of the University, was possible only because Andrzej, who was going to be the rector of the Academy, decided not to take this prestigious post.

Vetulani J. A healer, a scientist, a fighter, an artist. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 48-49.

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. (...) Andrew Szczeklik was always a wonderful host but also a wonderful guest. He could fascinate large crowds with his enthusiasm, and 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 were not exclusive for Andrew, and listening to his wisdom and his experience was always enlightening. It was a wonderful pleasant 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.

Virchow Jr JC, Virchow Sr JC. In memory of Professor Andrzej Szczeklik. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 50-51.

I met him in October 1988 as I was a newly elected chief of students' scientific movement at the Medical Academy of Nicolaus Copernicus in Krakow. A friend of mine was actively involved in a students' scientific activity at the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine in Krakow and encouraged me to come there. Professor Szczeklik, the head of this department, and his team had the reputation of being the best place to learn internal medicine in the city. Professor Szczeklik's courage and integrity in the years 1980–1989 as a member of the outlawed Solidarity Trade Union and an active supporter of the Independent Students' Association, was also most important to me. (...) I think that it is for his enthusiasm and passion for medicine, science, and other facets of life that Professor Szczeklik will be remembered by all who have worked with him. (...) he never required from his coworkers more than from himself, being actively involved at all stages of any project till the battle for a decent paper based on the results. He have always had one foot in the clinic and the other in the lab. He taught us that clinical observation, every odd result, can be the primary inspiration in research. He knew that for physicians, the combination of clinical and laboratory work is most stimulating.

Undas A. Professor Szczeklik: passion for medicine, science and life. *Pol Arch Intern Med.* 2012; 122 (Special Issue): 52-54.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTE Professor Andrzej Szczeklik was born on 29 July 1938 in Kraków, Poland. In 1961, he graduated from the Copernicus Academy of Medicine in Kraków, Faculty of Medicine. He continued his postgraduate training abroad, including the United States and Sweden. He defended his doctoral (1966), and then postdoctoral thesis (1969) at the Wrocław Medical University. In 1979, he became Associate Professor, and in 1989—Full Professor. In the years 1990–1993, he held the office of the Rector of the Academy of Medicine in Kraków and, together with Professor Andrzej Pelczar, the then Rector of the Jagiellonian University, managed to restore medical faculties to the Jagiellonian University (May 12, 1993). He was a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU).

His scientific interests focused mainly on the mechanisms underlying atherosclerosis and asthma. In 1975, he put forward a theory on the development of the so called aspirin-induced asthma, which was later substantiated and widely accepted by the research community. In 1976, after injecting himself and his colleagues with a newly discovered substance called prostacyclin, as the first person in the world he described its effects in humans.

In 1991, he won a major international tender for research, organized by the European Community Science Committee. He used procured resources to completely refurbish the hospital building housing the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine. He built a new 5-storey clinical wing, new research laboratories, and didactic facilities, with which he established one of the most innovative centers of internal medicine and genetics in Europe.

In 1997, he was awarded a prestigious prize of *The Lancet* for the discovery of the genetic basis for bronchial asthma. A year later, The London Royal College of Physicians awarded him with honorary membership for research on the mechanisms of blood clotting in cardiovascular diseases. In 1998, he received the first prize of the Polish Science Foundation. In 2000, he received the First Rector's Award: "The Jagiellonian Laurel." In 2001, he was honored with the first award of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. In 2008, he received the Clemens von Pirquet Award of the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

Professor Szczeklik was the author of about 600 papers published in many prestigious scientific journals. He coauthored several monographs and textbooks published, among others, in the United States, United Kingdom, and France. He was the editor of the first Polish evidence-based medicine textbook—*Internal Diseases*.

Professor Szczeklik was also a writer and essayist. He was the author of 3 books: *Catharsis: on the Art of Medicine* (Znak, 2002), translated into English, Hungarian, French, Russian, and Spanish, *Kore: on Sickness, the Sick, and the Search for*



FIGURE 4 Professor Andrzej Szczeklik

the Soul of Medicine (Znak, 2007), translated into English, Hungarian, Lithuanian, and German, as well as *Immortality. Promethean Dream of Medicine* (Znak, 2012), published after his death.

He died on 3 February 2012, after a short illness, in his beloved Department at 8 Skawińska Street in Kraków.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

CONFLICT OF INTEREST None declared.

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