

# Oncological organizations and institutions in Poland before the Second World War

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**Abstract:** During the first four decades of the 20th century many oncological organizations and institutions were established in Poland. On 6 June, 1906 the Committee for Cancer Research and Control was founded. After the year 1918 when Poland regained its independence many more cancer control organizations came into being. The organizations created at that time were: the Polish Committee for Cancer Control (Warsaw 1921), the Cancer Control Society of Łódź (Łódź 1927), the Vilnius Committee for Cancer Control (Vilnius 1931), the Polish Cancer Control Institute Association in Lviv (Lviv 1929), the Polish Cancer Control Association (Warsaw 1938). These cancer control organizations undertook multiphase activities (prophylactic, educational, organizational, scientific and research) by creating outpatient and inpatient oncological care institutions, on which base numerous scientific and research papers were produced. The effect of that work was the creation of the Radium Treatment Institute in Łódź and the Research and Therapeutic Institute for Cancer Control in Vilnius, as well as founding oncological hospital wards and clinics. The most important achievement was building and opening the very modern Radium Institute in Warsaw. The initiator of the Institute, which in 1939 had 90 beds on its disposal, was Maria Skłodowska-Curie herself. Cancer control organizations members and activists conducted many propaganda actions on malignant diseases, shared they observations and research findings during meetings, conferences and assemblies in Poland and abroad.

**Key words:** cancer, cancer control organizations, history of medicine, neoplasm, oncology

The first organization in Poland created with the objective of fighting cancer was the Committee for Cancer Research and Control. The organization was established on June 6, 1906 in Warsaw on the initiative of the famous obstetrician and gynecologist, Józef Jaworski, and its program included scientific research on cancer, cancer prevention and diagnostic and therapeutic activity in the field of oncology [1]. Before the First World War (until 1914), the Committee focused on prevention actions, that is appeals to women concerning reproductive organs cancer, the distribution of information leaflets, posters and brochures, and the organization of talks and lectures [2].

Regaining independence by Poland in 1918, after 123 years under foreign rule, became an impetus to establish modern health care structures. In 1921, on the initiative of the members of the contemporary Warsaw medical circle, especially Czesław Jankowski, Stefan Sterling-Okuniewski and Bronisław Wejnert, the Polish Committee for Cancer Control (Polski Komitet do Zwalczania Raka – PKdZR) was founded [3].

Its office was located at 31 Karowa St., Warsaw [4]. The clinic of the Committee, situated at 1 Karowa St., where radium treatment was administered, cooperated with Warsaw hospital wards and university teaching hospitals in the field of diagnostics and therapy. Moreover, in 1929, through the effort of the members of the PKdZR, a hospice for untreatable cancer patients at the internal ward of St. Lazarus's Hospital was established in Warsaw [5].

The Polish Committee for Cancer Control was involved in intense scientific and research activities, controlled by the special Scientific Committee, and its members participated in meetings, symposia, conferences and congresses in Poland and abroad. In the years 1918–1939 the Committee organized four all-Poland cancer congresses: in 1924 and 1929 in Warsaw, in 1932 in Łódź and in 1936 in Vilnius. Polish scientists also participated in two international oncological congresses: in Madrid in 1933 and in Brussels in 1936.

The Scientific Committee mentioned before provided material assistance to scientists carrying out research on cancer. Since 1935, members of the PKdZR could also make use of aids and grants awarded by the Jakub Potocki Foundation. Competitions for the best oncology research works were also announced.

The organization of great importance in the structure of the PKdZR was established in 1927 the Women Association which gathered the members of contemporary Poland high so-

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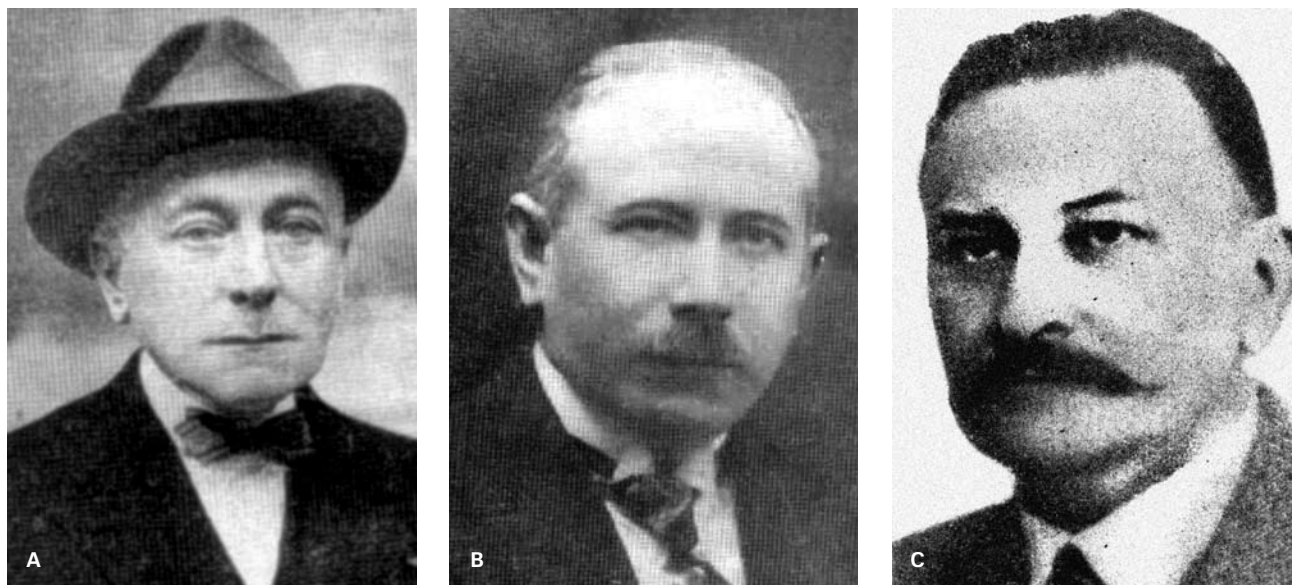
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**Fig.** Members of the Polski Komitet do Zwalczenia Raka (PKdZR). **A.** Aleksander Zawadzki – member of the PKdZR Council and the editor of the journal *Index Analyticus Cancerologiae*. **B.** Stefan Sterling-Okuniewski – secretary of PKdZR (1921–1934) and the first editor of the journals *Biuletyn Polskiego Komitetu do Zwalczenia Raka* and *Nowotwory* (1923–1934). **C.** Bronisław Adam Wejnert – President of PKdZR (1939), the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Nowotwory* (1934–1939) (reproduced from: Supady J. Organizacje i instytucje do walki z rakiem w Polsce w latach 1906–1939. Łódź, ADI, 2003: 14-15)

ciety in its ranks; in the years 1923–1932, the chairwoman of the Women Association was Michalina Mościcka, a wife of the President of the Republic of Poland, and since 1933 Aleksandra Piłsudska, a wife of the Marshal of Poland. The Women Association had a number of chapters: propaganda, hospital, social welfare and intelligence, which carried out a range of philanthropic and social activities [6].

The journal *Biuletyn Polskiego Komitetu do Zwalczenia Raka* (in 1928 renamed *Nowotwory*) was a scientific magazine of the PKdZR issued every three months since 1923. Polish physicians, the members of the PKdZR, participated in editing foreign oncological magazines, among others *Index Analyticus Cancerologic*, *Acta* and *Neoplasmae*.

In 1927, the Cancer Control Society of Łódź (Łódzkie Towarzystwo Zwalczenia Raka – ŁTZR) was founded. The initiator of its establishment was Juliusz Lange, who became the first chairman of the Society's board. Through efforts of the members of the ŁTZR the Radium Treatment Institute (Instytut Leczenia Radem) was opened in Łódź. Radium (250 mg) was purchased abroad. Radium was used for treatment also in St. Joseph's Hospital, 75 Drownowska St., Łódź (1926–1931) and in the Bethlehem Hospital, 15 Podleśna St., Łódź (1936–1939).

Considerable significance was attached to cancer prevention by organizing talks, lectures and special movie shows, and by the distribution of leaflets, posters, brochures and articles informing about cancer risk factors and cancer prevention methods, as well as their detection and treatment. In the 1930s, the so-called cancer days and cancer weeks were taking place in the city of Łódź. Scientific and research activities were

also carried out, which resulted in publications on cancer and contacts with scientists in Poland and abroad including cooperation with oncological scientific centers, e.g. with the International Cancer League in Paris. For this purpose, in 1937 in Łódź, the Research Laboratory headed by Kazimierz Ściesiński was opened. For social activities the Women Association attached to the ŁTZR was founded in 1929. Its chairwomen became Wanda Jaszczołtowa, and then Karolina Skalska [7].

In 1931, the Vilnius Committee for Cancer Control was established. Its founders were: Prof. Kornel Michejda, Prof. Kazimierz Opoczyński, Prof. Kazimierz Pelczar, Dr. Marian Przyalgowski and Dr. Henryk Rudziński. The first president of the Committee was director of the Bank Polski in Vilnius, Stanisław Białas [8]. In December 1931, governed by statutory guidelines, the Research and Therapeutic Institute for Cancer Control, located at 6 Polocka St., Vilnius, was opened. A roentgenologic and therapeutic ward and a surgical ward, where radium treatment was introduced, were formed in the Institute [9].

The Vilnius Committee for Cancer organized periodical scientific meetings and delegated its representatives to participate in oncological meetings and conferences both at home and abroad. On December 6–8, 1936, on the initiative of this Committee the 4th All-Poland Cancer Conference was held in Vilnius.

The activity of the Vilnius Committee for Cancer Control included, among others, the propaganda chapter involved in lectures on early symptoms, methods of detection and treatment of cancer.

In the years 1931–1939, the members of the Committee carried out and published numerous scientific and research studies concerning preventions, etiology, pathogenesis, diagnostics and treatment of cancer.

In 1929, in Lviv, the Polish Cancer Control Institute Association was founded. The first president of the Association was a voivode, Count Wojciech Gołuchowski [11]. A section of the building of the State Public Hospital in Lviv was assigned for a seat of the so-called St. Lawrence's Institute with 16 beds for cancerous patients. However, the most successful achievement of the Association was the questionnaire survey for statistical purposes concerning cancer incidence in Poland [12].

In the 1930s, the Cancer Chapter attached to the State Principal Health Council of the Ministry of Social Welfare was founded in Warsaw. On the initiative of its members, mainly physicians, efforts were made to establish an all-Poland organization for cancer control. According to the statute drawn up in 1936, the organization was to be named the Polish Cancer Control Association (Polski Związek Przeciwrakowy – PZP). Two units were to be established within the PZP, i.e. the Scientific Committee and the Women Association [13]. The first General Meeting of the PZP was held on April 12, 1939, when numerous institutions and scientific societies declared their intention to join the Association. Franciszek Karpiński was appointed the president of the PZP. Due to the outbreak of Second World War, the PZP did not manage to develop its activity [14].

Apart from the oncological institutions tabulated below, cancerous patient diagnostics and therapeutic activity was carried out by individual hospital wards and university teaching hospitals [10].

Erecting of the Radium Institute in Warsaw should be deemed the most successful organizational achievement of Polish oncology during the interwar period. The initiator of the project was Maria Skłodowska-Curie. In January 1932, the Institute began its diagnostic and therapeutic activity [15]. The medical section of the Institute was located in two buildings housing the outpatient clinic and the hospital composed of three wards: radium treatment, deep roentgen therapy and surgical ward. The first gram of radium, a quantity, which the hospital had at its disposal at first, was a gift from Maria Skłodowska-Curie [16]. The Institute established histopathological, clinical analysis and physical laboratories, and in 1937 the Experimental Oncology Institute was set up. The first director of the Radium Institute was Dr. Franciszek Łukaszczyk.

The Radium Institute in Warsaw became a subject of instant care and material support of Maria Skłodowska-Curie, therefore, it was regarded abroad as a significant institution of oncological treatment on the European scale and a place where scientific research was carried out and training projects were undertaken [17].

**Table. The most important institutions of inpatient and outpatient oncological treatment in Poland in the years 1918–1939 [10]**

Name of institution	Location	Years of activity
PKdZR Clinic (Radium Treatment Institute and Surgical Clinic)	1 Karowa St., Warsaw	1923–1939
Radium Treatment Institute of LTZR	175 Piotrkowska St., Łódź	1927–1939
Private Curie-therapy Institute	9 Garncarska St., Krakow	1924–1930
Research and Therapeutic Institute for Cancer Control (Internal Ward and Roentgenologic Ward)	6 Polocka St., Vilnius	1931–1939
Hospital ward for cancer patients (using radium for treatment)	St. Joseph's Hospital, 75 Drewnowska St., Łódź	1926–1931
Cancer ward	Bethlehem Hospital, 15 Podleśna St., Łódź	1936–1939
Ward for untreatable cancer patients	Municipal Home for Elderly and Cripples, 60 Narutowicza St., Łódź	1936–1939
Poznan University, Department of Surgery	Municipal Hospital, Poznań Transfiguration Hospital, Poznań	1921–1923 1923–1939
St. Lawrence's Institute	State Public Hospital, Lviv	1931–1939
Radium Ward of Department of Internal Medicine	Lviv	1937–1939
Poznan University, Chair of Medical Radiology	Poznań	1920–1939
Maria Skłodowska-Curie's Radium Institute	15 Wawelska St., Warsaw	1932–1939

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