

Seweryn Sterling: one of founders of Polish pulmonology and phtysiatry

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Abstract: Seweryn Sterling was born in Tomaszów Mazowiecki on February 21, 1864. His family was Jewish, although strongly polonized. He studied medicine at the Imperial Warsaw University and after graduation he worked in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. In 1894, Sterling moved to Łódź, where he established the first in the Kingdom of Poland "ward for chest disease patients". Thanks to Sterling, the first tuberculosis outpatient clinic was opened in Łódź in 1910. In his scientific and clinical activity, he preferred climatic and hygienic methods, like exercise, sunlight, diet, etc. He sparingly used tuberculin for treatment and introduced method of pulse palpation and body temperature examination to tuberculosis diagnostic evaluation. Sterling worked out an original tuberculosis classification, which has been applied in Poland since 1925. He was an author of 174 publications, including two textbooks. He was also an active member of many scientific associations in the country and abroad. In 1928, Sterling was made professor by the Independent Polish University. He died on August 6, 1932 in Rabka, and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Łódź.

Key words: history of medicine, phtysiatry, Polish medicine, pulmonology, Seweryn Sterling, tuberculosis treatment

Seweryn Sterling was born on February 21, 1864 in a settlement of Gustek near Tomaszów Mazowiecki (currently within the boundaries of Tomaszów Mazowiecki), into a Jewish family of Jakub and Franciszka, née Goldman. The Sterling family was quickly polonized, particularly since Jakub Sterling became a secretary of a famous Polish novelist Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. Already in his early youth, Sterling felt strong ties with the Polish people and the fate of Poland, which was proved by his membership (as a student) in the pro-independence Polish Youth Association. In the years 1883–1889, he studied medicine at the Imperial Warsaw University. He attended lectures by Prof. Ignacy Baranowski, when the famous internist taught his students that tuberculosis control was both a medical and social/professional task [1].

After receiving his medical diploma, Sterling went abroad for specialization internship. In the years 1889–1891, he was visiting lung disease teaching hospitals in Vienna, Munich and Jena.

Sterling commenced his professional career as a factory physician in 1891 in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. During the em-

ployment time in his home town, he deepened his interest in lung diseases and tuberculosis in particular. In 1894, Sterling published the results of his observations and studies, which drew attention of members of the Łódź Medical Association. In the same year, he moved to Łódź and took up duties of a factory physician in Rosenblatt and Jarociński companies (1894–1897). In 1897, he undertook the organization of the first in the Kingdom of Poland "ward for chest disease patients", in The Poznański Hospital. Two rooms for the future TB patients were separated from the internal ward managed by Ludwik Przedborski [2]. When Przedborski retired in 1908, Sterling became the head of the entire internal ward, increasing, at the same time, the number of beds in the tuberculosis ward from 8 to 12.

In 1910, on the initiative of Sterling, the first tuberculosis outpatient clinic was opened in Łódź, at the Tuberculosis League (established in 1907), and in 1918, a similar outpatient clinic was opened at the Tuberculosis Control Section of the Public Health Department of the Łódź Municipality. In 1915, due to his efforts, the first "sanitarium hospital" was established in Łódź. The famous Sterling theses, proposed in 1917, included suggestions about the desired actions to be initiated by the state, municipal government and society for tuberculosis control on the national scale.

It was also Sterling's initiative to establish the Chief Council for Tuberculosis Control at the Public Health Department of the Łódź Municipality. Due to this institution, prevention and stationary care of all sectors of health care, namely state, municipal, Health Insurance Fund, National Insurance Cen-

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ter, Workers' Association of Friends of Children and "Drop of Milk" Association in Łódź, were coordinated [3].

In his scientific and clinical activity, inextricably linked with diagnostics and treatment, Sterling preferred climatic and hygienic methods, like special diet, reasonably provided sunlight, spending time outdoors, etc. Sharing therapeutic skepticism, expressed by the eminent internist Alfred Sokołowski, about tuberculin discovered by Robert Koch, Sterling used it selectively and in a mild course of the disease. He was an ardent advocate of use of tuberculin for diagnostic purposes according to Pirquet, Moro or Mantoux tests. In 1907, Sterling introduced similar tests at the ward managed by him. Description and clinical practice use of the assessment of pulse frequency (1903) and body temperature curve (1914) as diagnostic and prognostic factors in tuberculosis, were of great importance to phtysiatry in Łódź [4]. Sterling worked out an original tuberculosis classification, which was deemed applicable in Poland by the 1st Tuberculosis Control Convention held in Kraków in 1925 [5].

Sterling published 174 works on tuberculosis, including two textbooks entitled "Hospital and Home Tuberculosis Treatment" and "Common Lung Consumption".

Sterling's huge successes in social and medical field included among others co-organization of the Łódź Department of the Warsaw Hygiene Association (1900), chairing the Łódź Medical Association (1916–1932), co-editing of *Czasopismo Lekarskie* (1899–1908), co-establishment and co-editing of *Gruźlica* and *Polska Gazeta Lekarska* and honorary membership of the Polish Tuberculosis Control Association.

Patriotic conduct was a distinctive feature of Sterling's character, which was manifested during the school strike in Łódź in 1905, when he was arrested and then long time kept under surveillance by the Ochrań (czarist secret police). In 1916, with a group of Łódź physicians involved in community work, Sterling introduced Polish administration to the Department of Public Health of the Łódź Municipality. He was honored with the Cross of Independence for participation in the pro-independence Polish Statehood League (during First World War) and in the Polish Councilmen Association (after 1918).

In 1928, the Independent Polish University, whose branch was also located in Łódź, made Sterling professor of hygiene, and Polska Akademia Umiejętności (Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences) granted him with correspondent membership [6].

Sterling was married and had four children: Janina (born 1900), Kazimierz (born 1902), Antoni (born 1903) and Zofia (born 1904). In the 1920s, the Sterling family lived in a tenement house at 111 Piotrkowska St., Łódź.

Sterling died on August 6, 1932 in Rabka, at the age of 68 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Łódź [7].

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