

Stanisław Kopczyński, a specialist in internal medicine and neurology – pioneer of school sanitary sciences in Poland

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Abstract: The beginnings of school hygiene are connected with the work of Dr Stanisław Kopczyński (1873–1933), a specialist in internal medicine and neurologist, who after the First World War organised hygienic and medical care in schools all over the country.

Key words: history of medicine, school hygiene, Stanisław Kopczyński

Doctor Stanisław Kopczyński was an outstanding Polish physician hygienist. He was born on the 10th of January, 1873 in Płońsk, Mazowsze in the craftsman family of Antoni and Aniela Sowiński; his father kept a small shoemaker workshop. He graduated from a grammar school in Płock in 1892 and was honored with a golden medal for his exceptional educational achievements. Doctor Aleksander Maciesza remembered that “...Stanisław Kopczyński was the best and most talented of all students who had ever left the Płock school and gone into society. Besides, there is a tradition that Kopczyński was deeply engaged in promotion of physical exercises and obedience of the rules of hygiene...” [1]. Five years later (in 1897) he received his doctor’s diploma at Warsaw University *cum eximia laude*. Following medical studies he completed his hospital training in internal diseases and neurology both in the country and abroad; among others he spent 6 months in Vienna at the departments of outstanding professors (Krafft and Ebing, Wagner and Jauregg, Nothnagl and Obersteiner) [2]. He returned to the Kingdom of Poland and started working with the team of doctor Theodore Dunin, then he received the position of head of neurological outpatient clinic at the Holy Ghost Hospital. A fruitful cooperation with Professor Edward Flatau resulted in a large number of publications in neurology and internal medicine [4].

Apart from his work as a neurologist and internal medicine specialist, doctor Kopczyński attached great significance to educational and social activity, particularly in the field of school hygiene. He was a pioneer and organizer of health care in educational institutions. His devotion to the questions asso-

ciated with school medicine resulted from his grammar-school period when he painfully experienced all sanitary negligence that young people attending schools at that time were exposed to (dirty rooms, no appropriate lighting, unsatisfactory ventilation of classrooms). Based on his medical knowledge he expressed the opinion that “...although the seeds of hygiene that have been sown in school medicine spring up slowly and one has to wait for the crop for a long time, still the aim is the improvement of health status and physical development of future generations...” [5].

In 1900, he made numerous speeches and published first articles on school hygiene. On the 10th of March 1900, in his lecture entitled *Standpoint and tasks of school physician* [6] and presented at the meeting of the Educational Section of Warsaw Hygienic Society, Kopczyński divided school hygiene into three parts, i.e. hygiene of school buildings and facilities, hygiene of the educational process and individual hygiene (proper physical education and hygienic habits of the student) [7]. In another article entitled *The role of some state institutions in hygienic education* Kopczyński stated that “The society should not be taught the rules of hygiene, but educated in accordance with them. Implementation of hygienic habits is the primary goal and task of the hygiene promulgator” [8]. At that time, he was given the post of school physician in the famous Merchants’ Trade School in Warsaw [9]. While performing this job for almost 20 years he made observations that he presented in numerous reports on school hygiene. As a member of the governing board of the School Matrix, doctor Kopczyński developed a division of hygienic and medical care over the Matrix schools. As soon as the Russian army left the lands of Poland in 1915, doctor Kopczyński made an effort to organize medical and hygienic care in the state schools in Warsaw. He was engaged in organizing health care in schools all over Poland, first as an area specialist and then as the head of department in the Ministry of Health and in the Ministry of Religious

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Fig. Stanisław Kopczyński, MD, PhD (reproduced from: Piasecki E. *Higiena Szkolna*. Warszawa, Lublin, Wilno, Nasza Księgarnia, 1939)

Denominations and State Education. Throughout the whole period of his work, Kopczyński was known as a great promoter of health care in both primary and secondary schools. He initiated Grzegorz Piramowicz's Foundation at the Warsaw Physicians Society whose goal was to honor school doctors for prominent achievements [10]. In 1931 doctor S. Kopczyński achieved the Order of Polonia Restituta for 30 years of his work in the field of school hygiene and he was also honored with the French "de l'Instruction Publique" [11]. He published many textbooks that dealt with school hygiene such as "Hygiene and school" (1905), "School hygiene" (1921, 1933), "Rules of school hygiene" (1924), "Health of primary school pupils in Poland" (1929).

He was married, fathered 3 children: a daughter Barbara (teacher), and sons, Jack (architect in Rio de Janeiro) and Andrew (dentist) [12]. Doctor Kopczyński died because of a neoplastic disease at the age of 60, on the 11th of July 1933 in Cieszyn. He was buried in Wisła, in the region of Cieszyn Silesia [13]. A maxim Promoting hygiene in schools and by schools is one of the most essential tasks that the 19th century bequeathed to be completed by the 20th century is written on doctor Kopczyński's grave ledger. The doctor's students

and collaborators from the Merchants' Trade School honored his memory with founding a commemorative plaque. As an epitaph one could cite the words uttered during his funeral ceremony, "One of the best teachers has left; the one that really cared for the health of the developing generation and that loved young people who would leave their schools and enter the society to become a great social strength of the nation."

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