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FORTY-FIVE YEARS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL PSYCHOLOGY AT MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW – FROM CLASSICAL NEUROPSYCHOLOGY TO QUALITY OF LIFE RESEARCH

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SUMMARY

The Department of Medical Psychology has now been functioning at the Medical University of Warsaw for 45 years, teaching psychology in every department of our university; we also conduct research and supervise doctoral dissertations. We have received many individual and group awards for the construction and realization of our courses. As is typical for all medical sciences, our research is multi-thematic. Our main area of interest is psychological analysis of various aspects of the functioning and quality of life (QOL) of patients with various diseases and syndromes. Professor Krzysztof Owczarek has studied patients with epilepsy and various aspects of their QOL. He has also studied psychological methods of discrimination between epileptic seizures and psychogenic pseudoepileptic seizures. He has published numerous articles in medical journals in Poland and abroad, and a book in Polish on psychogenic pseudoepileptic seizures. Several of his articles have been recognised as the best published articles in the journal *Epileptologia*, and have earned him the *Virtuti Medicinali* award. Research on the psychological aspects of functioning in patients after myocardial infarction also has a long tradition at our department. Thanks to the initiative of Dr Dorota Włodarczyk, our department is collaborating with Norway in the realization of a grant “Psychological health-promoting factors in cardiac patients – constructing a Polish-Norwegian research project.” Among our department’s many important achievements in this area is the book *Ischemic Heart Disease* (in Polish).

INTRODUCTION

This October the Department of Medical Psychology (DMP) at the Medical University of Warsaw will be celebrating its 45th anniversary. Every anniversary is a good occasion to look back, analyse earlier activities and summarise achievements. Many major changes have taken place in our country in the last few decades, both political and social. Poland opened up to the world and Europe, and now has far more opportunities than before to obtain funds for research projects, both statutory and personal. Our university has also benefited from these changes. Within the last ten years, a new unit has been established, the Department of Health Sciences. This department is important for the training of medical professionals. From the very start, we have actively participated in the realization of this department's teaching objectives. We have taught current and future nurses, midwives, paramedics and public health students. This new structure was a challenge for the university and for our department. We had to develop and implement completely new syllabuses and teaching methods. Dr Anna Jakubowska-Winecka coordinated work on these projects at our department, and the results won us two Rector's awards for teaching excellence in 2004, one individual and one group. We have received three more awards within the last two years: the Minister of Health and Social Welfare award to Dr Włodarczyk and Dr Anna Jakubowska-Winecka for editing the book *Psychology in Medical Practice* (2008), the Rector's award (2nd degree) to Prof. Krzysztof Owczarek for his handbook *Psychology in Nursing* (2009), and the Rector's award (3rd degree) to the whole department (2009).

Our teaching is very time consuming, and it mobilises us to considerable creative effort. We teach in most faculties and departments at the Medical University of Warsaw. Not only do we perform our required number of hours (about 3000), but we even teach overtime (about 1000 hours). We also supervise and review numerous bachelor's and master's theses. Finally, we do research and supervise doctoral theses.

RESEARCH

Research at our department is conducted at many levels – a typical pattern in the medical sciences. At present, our basic focus is analysis of the psychological aspects of patient functioning and quality of life in patients with various diseases and syndromes. One group of patients that has attracted our particular attention are patients with epilepsy. Professor Krzysztof Owczarek evaluated the functioning of patients with this disease. He used two instruments of his own construction, Bex 1 and Bex 2, to analyse various aspects of quality of life in pregnant reproductive-age women with epilepsy. He has also studied the psychological methods of differentiating between epileptic seizures and psychogenic pseudo-epileptic seizures, and his findings have been published in medical journals in Poland and abroad. He has

also published a book entitled *Psychogenic Pseudo-epileptic Seizures* (in Polish). Several of his articles have been recognized as the best published research in "Epileptologia" (1997/1998 and 2003/2004) and others have won the author the *Virtuti Medicinali* award from the Polish Neuropsychological Society. Quality of life in patients with epilepsy has also been studied by Hanna Rozenek, MA, who is now writing her PhD on quality of life in epilepsy under Professor Owczarek's supervision.

Another long tradition in our department has been the study of cardiac patients, particularly patients after myocardial infarction. Professor Kazimierz Wrześniewski pioneered the work in this area, and Dr Dorota Włodarczyk, a postdoctoral fellow at our department, is continuing his legacy. Dr Włodarczyk analysed the effects of patients' subjective appraisal on emotional state and coping with MCI-related stress. It is important to note that her research is prospective, and hence all the more valuable. She is now continuing her studies of this group of patients under a grant from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. On her initiative, our department has recently launched a collaborative project with the Norwegian Science and Technology University (NTNU) in Trondheim, and has conducted research under the auspices of a Polish-Norwegian grant concerning post-myocardial-infarction care and quality of life in various stages of coronary heart disease, entitled "Psychological health-promoting factors in cardiac patients – constructing a Polish-Norwegian research project." In cooperation with the Norwegians, Dr Włodarczyk has collaborated with the Psychosomatic Research Group, now the Research Centre for Health Promotion and Resources. Magdalena Łazarzewicz, MA, has recently joined this group and is writing her doctoral dissertation on this area of research. She authored a Young Researcher Project and has received a scholarship from the Foundation for the Development of the Educational System, on the basis of which she has received a grant from the Scholarship and Training Fund, sponsored by the EEA and Norway Grants, within which she is working on a project entitled "Personality Dispositions, Social Support and Quality of Life in Senior Cardiac Patients."

Agnieszka Dziurawicz-Kozłowska is doing research on quality of life in patients with pathological obesity who have undergone bariatric surgery. She is now implementing the Young Researcher Project of which she is the author. Her work has produced interesting results, presented in articles and papers at international interdisciplinary conferences.

Dr Marta Rządkiwicz is investigating health psychology and psychological adaptation. Her main focuses of interest are neuropsychology and developmental psychology in the broad sense. She is currently working on the construction of a psychometric instrument to assess the level of patients' adaptation to life with chronic somatic conditions, and is also studying the effects of such conditions on cognitive and emotional functioning and behaviour. She has published many scientific and popular articles. In 2008 she published a chapter on "Neurocognitive dysfunctions in the course of selected chronic

diseases of the respiratory system” in the book “Medical Neuropsychology.” She has also been an active collaborator with the monthly *Remedium*, the Business Women’s Centre, the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, and the College of Photography in Warsaw.

Another area of research is the empirical work of Mirosława Adamus, MA. She is focusing on selected aspects of the functioning of the health care system, and particularly the applicability of psychological expertise for clinical practice. Her participants are representatives of various medical professions – physicians, nurses and midwives – and she wants to know whether, and to what extent, psychology can be helpful in the clinical practice of these professional groups.

Tomasz Krasuski, MA, completed a postgraduate course in sexuology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He practiced his psychological skills as a trainee and volunteer conducting neuropsychological rehabilitation of stroke and motor vehicle accident victims, always bearing in mind their quality of life. He also conducted therapy with abused children and participated in client therapy. He has published on bulimia and anorexia.

Dr Joanna Chylińska is interested in cognitive-behavioural therapy, the psychological aspects of palliative care, and the importance of doctor-patient relations during therapy. She is also interested in quality of life in patients with chronic somatic diseases.

Jolanta Banasiewicz, MA, teaches nurses and midwives. She is interested in women’s quality of life in obstetrics. Since 2000 she has also conducted therapy as a hospital psychologist. She helps patients overcome stress caused by illness, diagnostic procedures and hospitalisation. She also teaches psychology to parents-to-be at prenatal classes.



Fig. 1. The Department of Medical Psychology team (2009). From left to right: Stanisław Wójtowicz, Przemysław Mućko, Agnieszka Dziurawicz-Kozłowska, Magdalena Łazarewicz, Joanna Chylińska, Dorota Włodarczyk, Hanna Rozenek, Jolanta Banasiewicz, Tomasz Krasuski, Krzysztof Owczarek

Stanisław Wójtowicz, MA, is interested in health psychology and stress psychology, and is becoming more and more involved with sport psychology (he is a member of the psychological commission at the Polish Olympic Committee). He attends many psychological and medical conferences every year.

Przemysław Mućko, MA, is both a research psychologist and a psychotherapist. He is currently completing his training in cognitive therapy and honing his practical skills at an internship at the Department of Neurotic Disorders at Otwock Hospital. His main interest is application of psychotherapy in the treatment of somatic patients.

Marta Czerwik-Kulpa, MA, is a doctoral student in our Department, interested in identifying basic patterns of coping with illness and the effects of psychological adjustment to cancer on the experience of pain and quality of life.

As we can see from this necessarily brief presentation of our Department's staff, we are all involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in the empirical study of broadly understood quality of life in patients. It is worth noting that quality of life has become a key focus of interest at our Department. Let us now trace the historical background of our current concerns and the evolution of our previous research areas.

THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL PSYCHOLOGY – HISTORY

The first head of the Department of Medical Psychology (formerly the Department of Clinical Psychology, Medical Academy) was Professor Mariusz Maruszewski, the distinguished Polish neuropsychologist. Professor Maruszewski obtained his degree in psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy, Moscow University, where he studied from 1950 to 1955. Upon graduation he became an assistant to another great Polish psychologist, Professor Tadeusz Tomaszewski. After World War II Professor Tomaszewski animated many extremely valuable scientific initiatives, and without him the rapid and highly ramified development of Polish psychology would have been unthinkable. So, our first boss began his professional career at the Chair of General Psychology at the Department of Education, Warsaw University. Very soon his inexhaustible energy, ambition and ability led him to initiate research on the brain mechanisms of speech and its disorders. In 1958-59 he completed an internship at the Institute of Neurosurgery in Moscow under the supervision of the outstanding Russian neuropsychologist Alexander Luria. He received his doctorate in 1960 on the basis of his dissertation "On the disturbances of the simplest forms of voluntary behaviour in focal brain lesions." He organised from scratch and launched the first Department of Clinical Psychology at the Medical Academy in Warsaw. The Department worked in excellent collaboration with the Department of Neurology, the Department of Neurosurgery and the Department of Neurological Rehabilitation in Konstancin. Professor Maruszewski drove a small yellow Volkswagen Beetle, and since he

was a very tall man with a rather large girth he and his tiny vehicle were not the best of matches. He used to drive his female assistants to their practices in the STOCER hospital in Konstancin. And it was in this car that he coached them for their future neuropsychologist role and examined their knowledge. All this rather resembled the biblical Massacre of the Innocents. On the way back they discussed the more difficult cases which were quite frequent in the rehabilitation of higher nervous functions. At that time another eminent Polish psychologist, Jan Strelau – then doctor – supervised the work of the Department.

Professor Maruszewski became an associate professor in 1972. He also received many Rector's awards for his scientific accomplishments, produced over 30 publications and also wrote many popular articles. He took part in many international conferences, including conferences organized by UNESCO. He had several functions in national and international societies and organizations: the Committee for Psychological and Educational Sciences, the US Academy of Aphasia (regular member) and the Aphasia Research Group at the World Federation of Neurology. His main publications include *Speech and Brain* (1970) and *The Patient with Aphasia and his Rehabilitation* (1974). Premature death interrupted the career of this exceptionally energetic researcher and lecturer. He managed his Department to the very end.

Professor Irena Heszen succeeded Professor Maruszewski as head of the Department of Clinical Psychology at the Warsaw Medical Academy. In addition to this function, she was also national program coordinator and conference organizer for the teaching of psychology at medical academies. Professor Heszen's main interests at that time were doctor-patient relations, and these resulted in her doctoral dissertation (1970) "The effect of pre-operative information on female surgical patients' emotional reactions, behaviour and attitudes toward selected aspects of the hospital situation." This dissertation not only earned very good reviews for its substance and quality, but also attracted considerable interest from medical practitioners. The author was invited to clinical research meetings, where she presented the results of research conducted by the Department faculty. Professor Heszen received a Rector's award for her scientific achievements. She obtained her postdoctoral degree (habilitation) in 1979 on the basis of her dissertation "Cognitive Determinants of Behaviour toward Illness." Together with her colleagues she initiated research on the effect of doctor-patient relations on the diagnostic and treatment process. She had numerous publications and presented many conference papers. She left the Warsaw Medical Academy in 1980 to continue her career at the Silesian University.

Professor Krzysztof Czubalski, MD, was head of the Department of Clinical Psychology from 1994 to 1999. He began to work at the Department as a senior assistant when he already had a doctoral degree in medicine, and was a 1st-degree specialist in psychiatry. His research focused on the psychosomatic determinants of allergic diseases. The Psychosomatic Clinic which he organized at the Department of Clinical Psychology was unique on



Prof. Mariusz Maruszewski (1965-1973)



Prof. Irena Heszen (1973-1980)



Prof. Krzysztof Czubalski (1995-1999)



Prof. Kazimierz Wrześniewski (1980-1995;
1999-2004)

a national scale. He was interested in the treatment of chronic urticaria and he successfully combined psychotherapy and drug therapy. He analyzed the effect of psychological factors on the course of chronic urticaria. In 1982 he presented his postdoctoral dissertation, entitled "Difficult situations and the resultant emotional disorders and psychopathological reactions in the pathogenesis of some allergic diseases." In 1993 he was promoted to associate professor at the Warsaw Medical Academy. He was particularly interested in the consequences and ways of coping with stress and the contribution of psychosocial factors to the pathogenesis of somatic disease. He lectured on the effect of illness on human functioning with elements of psychopathology at training courses for physicians at the Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education. He published many scientific and popular works on medicine. He wrote five chapters in the student handbook *Selected issues in psychosomatic medicine and the psychology of the somatic patient* (edited by K. Wrześniew-

ski and B. Skuza). For many years Professor Czubalski was a Member of the Board of the Psychosomatic Medicine Section of the Polish Medical Society and he also sat on the scientific councils of the Psychosomatic Institute in Warsaw.

Professor Kazimierz Wrześniewski headed the Department from 1980 to 1994 and then again from 1999 to 2004. He received his PhD at the Institute of Psychology, Warsaw University, in 1972 and his postdoctoral degree at the Warsaw Medical Academy in 1991. His main areas of interest were the psychosocial determinants of the onset and development of somatic diseases and their consequences, and Type A behaviour, coping and quality of life in cardiac patients. Professor Wrześniewski is an active member and national representative of several international organizations: the European Health Psychology Society, the Stress and Anxiety Research Society, and the American Psychosomatic Society. He has collaborated actively with several universities in Europe and the US, including Penn State and Western Washington University in the US and the Università di Roma La Sapienza in Rome, Italy. He is member of the Editorial Board of the Polish journal *Promocja Zdrowia. Nauki Społeczne i Medycyna* [Health Promotion. The Social Sciences and Medicine]. He had two fellowships in the US: 9 months in 1978 and 10 weeks in 1988. Several times he has received awards from the Rector of the Medical Academy for teaching excellence, and from the Rector of Warsaw University for research achievements. Professor Wrześniewski inspired the study of the psychological aspects of functioning of post-myocardial-infarction patients. An inter-university team working under his supervision and in cooperation with Warsaw University launched a research program to study the effects of specific and general anxiety on patients in post-MI rehabilitation. This team prepared the Polish adaptation of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). They drew attention to the cognitive aspects of patient functioning and to the role of cognitive appraisal in the coping process, and cooperated with US research centres to investigate Type A behaviour patterns and their effects on the risk of coronary heart disease. They also launched a study of the role of social support as a factor reducing the risk of various diseases, and studied coping with stress. The choice of research topics was increasingly unique for the team and quite different from the standard tasks of clinical psychologists.

Not only was the increasing willingness to address specific areas of knowledge at the intersection of psychology and medicine the hallmark of the team's evolution, it also reflected world trends, which led to the birth of a new discipline, medical psychology. This was expressed in the change of the Department's name in 1992 to the Department of Medical Psychology. Two years later, in 1994, the Department wrote and published a handbook which was a compendium of information on medical psychology specifically addressed to Medical Academy students. For many years the contents of the handbook were the bedrock of the department's syllabus.

EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL IDEAS AND INTERESTS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL PSYCHOLOGY

As a student of Luria, Professor Mariusz Maruszewski was certainly a competent classical neuropsychologist. But he was also an extremely creative and flexible writer, author of several theories of brain regulative mechanisms underlying various psychological processes and higher nervous activities. Professor Maruszewski laid the neurophysiological and neuropsychological foundations for Professor Tadeusz Tomaszewski's action theory. Both men assumed that the central nervous system, particularly its most complex component, i.e. the brain, was responsible for the regulation of typically human actions. The brain, with the help of afferent neural pathways, receives all the information concerning the internal state of the organism. It responds to this information input by generating appropriate behaviour programs depending on the individual's current situation. These programs are implemented with the help of executive functions which constitute the content of actions, many of which are very complex (Maruszewski 1977, see also Pachalska 1999). According to (then) current ideas, actions were very important because they gave behaviour direction. Behaviour was directed toward the achievement of goals, i.e. predetermined, consciously selected ideal states or optimal outcomes. Psychology was now to be a science of human actions and of men and women as the agents of these actions (Tomaszewski 1977). Action theory was all about how people choose goals and strive to realize them. Professor Tomaszewski, the author of the theory, and his collaborator, wanted their theory to be useful. We can therefore imagine that the quality of life concept would fit into this theory perfectly because in no way did it contradict action theory.

Professor Irena Heszen adopted the assumptions of the psychosomatic approach and emphasized the role of psychological factors in the aetiology, course and treatment of all illnesses. She analysed concepts such as health and disease, not only from the perspective of the biomedical sciences, but also from the perspective of the behavioural and humanistic sciences. This approach converged with the ideas of behavioural medicine, whose basic assumption was that every human being is a biopsychosocial entity, in health as in illness. This applies to prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of the sick. Professor Heszen believed that health was a value located inside the individual. As such, it acts on behalf of the individual because it is valued and therefore becomes a goal of activity. Also, health and illness, rather than being two aspects of a single continuum, are two distinct dimensions, except that health is a positive value whereas disease is a negative value (Tomaszewski 1977). Professor Heszen and her colleagues at the Department also paid a great deal of attention to the problem of disease symptoms as a source of stress.

Professor Czubalski likewise thought that disease was both a biological hazard and a psychosocial hazard, which disrupted the realization of life

goals and tasks or prevented the satisfaction of various needs. Meanwhile, in a handbook of their joint authorship, Professors Wrześniewski and Czubalski wrote that disease-related complaints alter the hierarchy of information input, disrupt emotional and cognitive processing and reduce general intellectual efficiency. It is not only memory functions that can be disrupted. Attention may be affected and ability to learn can be permanently disturbed. When the emotional sphere is not functioning properly, the patient can be depressed, irritated and quick-tempered, anxious or even aggressive. Activity, i.e. conscious and organized goal-directed behaviour, is reduced. Disease symptoms together with the ensuing limitations can lead to transient or permanent dysfunction, or single or multi organ dysfunction, and this dysfunction reciprocally affects the patient's physical and psychological functioning. These dysfunctions do not usually last long in acute diseases and recovery is usually complete. This is not always the case, however, especially with chronic diseases, in which case permanent insufficiency of the whole organism or some part of it may result, leading to serious and long-term incapacity (Wrześniewski & Skuza 1994). Elsewhere the authors give a lengthy account of the negative effects of long-term somatic illness on role-functioning in the family and at work. They also discuss the consequences of chronic motor and mental dysfunction and the patient's associated dependency on the proximal environment and the ensuing alterations of role and status in the family and changes in the family structure as such. Illness also means deteriorated economic status. Not only is treatment costly but it usually means reduced income and negative change in social status. Today work is one of the main determinants of activity and achievement evaluation and prestige, and so illness may seriously threaten these values (Wrześniewski & Skuza 1994).

It was these ideas, briefly presented here, that have brought the Department much closer to the concept of quality of life in medicine.

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