János Veres: the man behind the needle

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It has now been 30 years since the Hungarian physician János Veres died. There is hardly an individual who has become so well known years after his death. The reason for this is the advent of minimally invasive surgery. Surgeons worldwide use his needle to create the capnoperitoneum. But who was János Veres? To whom ought we pay tribute for the most frequently used access to the peritoneal and pleural cavity?

János Veres was born on November 14, 1903, in Kis-majtény (about 130 km south of Budapest), where his father worked for the railway company. He was educated at a Catholic school in Debrecen. From a young age, he exhibited a natural aptitude for the arts, especially painting (Fig. 1). His wish to study fine arts did not materialize. Instead, he enrolled as a medical student and graduated with an MD in 1927 from the University of Debrecen. After spending several months at the department of forensic pathology, he commenced work in the internal medicine department in Szombathely Hospital, close to the Austrian border.

After earning his PhD degree on September 14, 1932, where his work dealt with the clinical features and treatment of tularemia, he was appointed head of department of 45 beds in Kapuvár. Here he gained extensive experience in treating pulmonary disorders, especially tuberculosis. At that time, lung collapse by artificial pneumothorax was used to exclude and rest the infected part of the lung from ventilation. Veres designed his needle specifically for this

purpose—the safe creation of pneumothorax, a procedure he personally performed 862 times in the year 1933. He published a description of this invention in an obscure Hungarian journal. His invention remained unknown to the rest of the world until 1938, when he published his invention in German, which permitted his technique and method to become widespread [1, 2]. In 1933 he married Amália Falkò, with whom he had two sons, János, born in 1934, and Miklòs, born 3 years later. In World War II, when Veres was 41 years old, he was conscripted into the army until the end of the war. A few months after his rehabilitation to civilian life, in August 1948, he was reinstated as chairman of his old unit. According to accounts from colleagues, in addition to being an excellent physician, Veres was a cultured and sensible man.

There has some dispute on the correct spelling of his family name. However, in his original birth certificate, it is written as VERES (Fig. 2).

His firstborn son, János, also became a doctor of internal medicine and moved to practice in Germany. His second son, Miklòs, had poliomyelitis and had no chance for further education in their small town. Because of his son's disability, Veres resigned from his position and moved to Budapest to enable and assist his son to study fine arts. Miklòs became an accomplished painter.

During his professional life, Veres worked in various hospitals in Budapest and was highly respected as a consultant. He had other scientific interests in addition to tularemia, including carbon dioxide snow treatments for peripheral arterial disease. He remarried after the death of his wife. With his second wife, Dr. Márta Veres, he had a daughter who also became a doctor; she specialized as a psychiatrist in Budapest. After retiring in 1973, Veres continued his work at the famous St. Gellèrt Hotel in Budapest. Veres died on January 27, 1979.

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Fig. 1 Self-portrait of Veres as a young man

Fig. 2 Veres's birth certificate

Because I was interested in the history of surgery, I visited his family in Budapest. On that occasion, I had the pleasure of meeting his widow, his daughter, and his son

Fig. 3 First row from left: Miklós Veres (son of the first marriage of Dr. János Veres), Dr. Éva Veres (wife of Miklós Veres), Dr. Márta Veres (second wife of Dr. János Veres) Second row from left: the author (Dr. Wolfgang Wayand), Dr. Andrea Veres (daughter of the second marriage of Dr. János Veres)

Miklós (Fig. 3). Many interesting oil paintings by Miklós decorated the small apartment.

During my interview with his family, I was informed that János Veres had no commission or royalty on his invention; instead, he gave his needle to the Aesculap Company in Tuttlingen for a few kilos of coffee. When I saw his son in a wheelchair, I decided to contact the Aesculap Company to tell them the story. They responded immediately by donating a new and modern wheelchair to Miklós. Thus at least the invention of the father, which is used by millions of surgeons worldwide, brought some comfort to his beloved son.

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