

Obituary

Dr. Zdeněk Kunc

Dr. Zdeněk Kunc, Professor of Neurosurgery in the Faculty of General Medicine, Charles University, Prague, Chairman emeritus of the Neurosurgical Clinic in Prague, died suddenly from acute heart failure in his home on May 10, 1985. A prominent personality of the European post-war neurosurgical generation, one of the founders of the European Association of Neurosurgical Societies and the past President of the 4th European Neurosurgical Congress in Prague, 1971, left his still unfinished work and his friends all over the world.

Born in 1908 in Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Kunc entered the Medical Faculty of Charles University in Prague in 1927 and graduated in 1932. His surgical career started in a small garrison hospital, but soon he became involved in the main stream of surgery in Czechoslovakia. Between 1936 and 1945, Kunc kept in close professional contact with three Czech surgeons whose names represented the top in this field in Czechoslovakia and later in Europe, Arnold Jirásek, František Burián and Emerich Polák. Jirásek was one of the first general surgeons interested in neurosurgery in this country, Burián initiated plastic surgery in Europe and Polák was a skilled and very active abdominal and thoracic surgeon. Kunc took the opportunity to learn up-to-date surgical techniques from all of them and to understand the problems of differentiation in general surgery, which had just started to be of interest in those years.



In neurological surgery, Kunc was a self-made-man who started building up this field on the broad basis of general surgery. This was mainly in the first post-war years in Plzeň, where he started the disc surgery and, later from 1948 in Prague, where the surgery of the nervous system became his foremost interest. Kunc initiated the first specialized neurosurgical unit in Prague and, in 1959, became Professor at the Charles University Neurosurgical Clinic. At the peak of his surgical activities, Kunc deliberately decided to concentrate his efforts on neurological surgery and to develop this interdisciplinary branch of surgery into the modern highly specialized field, combining clinical practise, teaching and research at a high international standard. He succeeded with the realization of this project.

From 1954, within a few years, Kunc got actively in contact with many European neurosurgeons, visited many countries in Europe and overseas and gradually integrated the Czechoslovakian neurosurgery into the main-stream. This active role in international cooperation was very fruitful. The Czechoslovakian neurosurgical society, presided by Kunc for many years, soon joined the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies, and was at the cradle of the European Association of Neurosurgical Societies in 1971 and made many bilateral professional contacts. Kunc was elected an Honorary Member of eleven national neurosurgical societies, appointed Honorary

Doctor of the University of Gothenburg (1970), elected President of the 4th European Neurosurgical Congress and awarded more than 15 national or international Medals of Honour. The last one was the Medal of Honour of the W.F.N.S. which he received, unfortunately, only 2 months after his death in 1985, in memoriam.

Kunc's activity in the organization of Czechoslovakian as well as international neurosurgery was only a part of his achievements. As a clinical scientist, Kunc was attracted by many interesting topics in neurosciences. His monograph on sciatica and its surgical treatment which appeared in 1949 was the first, and for a long time the only publication in Czech on this subject. The problems of the surgical treatment of pain had attracted Kunc since the early sixties. After having collected broad clinical experience with trigeminal tractotomy, he elaborated the techniques of this procedure into the finest anatomical and functional details, both clinically and experimentally. The results were presented in many publications in Czechoslovakia and abroad and discussed at several international congresses and symposiums. Kunc's work on the trigeminal neuralgia complex made a firm basis for clinical as well as experimental research of chronic human pain.

Arteriovenous malformations in functionally important regions of the brain represent another focus of his interest. He started studying and treating surgically even most extensive lesions with the idea that the arteriovenous malformations were a result of maldevelopment of the capillary system and that the brain tissue within their space was hypoplastic, without function or entirely missing. He documented this idea in many papers and presented it at many international meetings.

In addition to pain and arteriovenous malformations, which were to some extent his personal hobbies, Kunc's scientific activities covered practically all fields of neurosurgery. He founded the first centre for surgical treatment of spinal cord injuries in Czechoslovakia in the

early fifties, initiated stereotaxic and functional neurosurgery in this country in 1959, and accepted early and developed surgical hypothermia, controlled hypotension and microsurgery. As a typical team-maker, he always succeeded in creating specialized complex teams of younger scientists at his clinic, most of them working for long periods in clinical research. His active scientific attitude was attractive to many neuroscientists from Czechoslovakia and from other countries. Nine of his collaborators were awarded the Candidate of Sciences, 4 Doctor of Sciences, 5 appointed Associate Professors and 1 Professor of Neurosurgery. Kunc founded the Czech neurosurgical school which continues his work in Prague and in other centres in Czechoslovakia.

As chairman of the unit, Kunc was more an elder friend than a boss. He was always ready to discuss his ideas and problems with his younger colleagues and, many times, to accept their opinion, different though it might be. Kind, deeply democratic and with an informal personality, he created the pleasant and highly active atmosphere around himself not only at the clinic but anywhere he appeared. An active sportsman, man with broad cultural background and manifold cultural interests, loving and beloved father of his family of 4 children, Kunc has been well known all over Czechoslovakia and in many places abroad. He was happy enough to enjoy his fruitful life till the last minute and to see its fruits ripening. His life will remain a deep inspiration for those who will continue his work. His memory will survive his physical death not only among the Czechoslovakian neurosurgeons but even in the minds and hearts of his friends abroad.

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