

A neurologist who wrote poetry... Commemorating the 13th anniversary of the death of Stanisław Nowak, D.Sc. Med., the first Editor-in-Chief of “Medical Studies”

Neurolog, który wiersze pisał... Minęło 13 lat od śmierci pierwszego redaktora naczelnego „Studiów Medycznych”, dr. hab. n. med. Stanisława Nowaka

Joanna Nowak

Library, Jan Kochanowski University, Kielce, Poland

Medical Studies/Studia Medyczne 2020; 36 (1): 66–71

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5114/ms.2020.94093>

Stanisław Nowak (Figure 1) was born in the small village of Kotlice near Kielce on 8 November 1936. He studied at the Medical Faculty of Białystok Medical University between 1957 and 1963. On graduating, he took up employment at the Regional Hospital in Kielce, where he was relatively quickly promoted to Deputy Head of Department. He became Grade 1 specialist in neurology in 1968, earning his Grade 2 diploma in 1971, his doctorate in 1969, and a doctor habilitatus (roughly equivalent to the Doctor of Science) degree in 1977. His main scientific interests included epilepsy, cerebral stroke, cerebrospinal fluid, neurological syndromes in internal diseases, neuroepidemiology, prostaglandins, biochemical tumour markers, causes of neurological disorders, and EEG measurements. It was under his guidance that prostaglandins were first used in Kielce in the treatment of neurological conditions, including ischaemic strokes [1–6]. Dr Nowak also initiated national (Ministry of Health-based) research on late-onset epilepsy. In collaboration with nuclear physicists from Kielce Paedagogical College (now the Jan Kochanowski University), he also conducted early human research on, among others, the determination of trace elements in the cerebrospinal fluid of neurological patients [6, 7]. His articles in specialist journals and participation in numerous conferences in Poland and abroad helped to disseminate his findings, provoke new discussions, and make friends not only within academia, but also socially and in political circles (which was important in terms of the posts he assumed).

His biographical information [2] reveals that he headed the local (treating patients from an administrative region) centre of neurological treatment uninterrupted for nearly a quarter of a century. During that time, all doctors from the city and region of Kielce specialising in neurology would spend time as interns there, including those who were later to become heads of specialised neurology departments in Końskie, Skarżysko-Kamienna, Staszów, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, or Starachowice. Doctors specialising in other branches of medicine were also traditionally



Figure 1. Stanisław Nowak, poet – a photograph from the back cover of several of his poetry volumes

admitted for internships [6]. Dr Nowak adeptly took care of “connections”, collaboration, exchange of experiences and information, both locally, with other departments of the hospital (via mutual patient referrals and exchange of equipment), and with other neurological centres around Poland (offering instruction in novel methods or treatment and surgical techniques). The department collaborated on a continuous basis with the Medical University in Cracow, Psychoneurological Institute in Warsaw, Department of Neurology of the Military Medical University in Warsaw, Department of Neurology and Epileptology at the Centre for Post-Graduate Medical Education in Warsaw, Department of Neurology at Lublin Medical University, Department of Neurology at the Silesian Medical University in Zabrze, Committee for Neurological Sciences at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Committee for Brain Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw (Nencki Institute), Division of Clinical Neurophysiology at the Medical University in Warsaw, and the Polish Antiepilepsy League in Warsaw [1–2, 6]. Of note, it was Stanisław Nowak who led the initiative to

purchase computed tomography equipment in Kielce. He made efforts to ensure the necessary funds and was a member of a small group who chose equipment from a particular company [6].

His teaching work commenced as early as 1974, at the Clinical Observation-Infectious Disease Ward of the Clinical Teaching Complex of the Medical University in Cracow at the Polyclinical Hospital in Kielce. The centre existed under different names until 1991, as described above. During that period (1985–1987), following completion of the habilitation procedure, Associate Professor Stanisław Nowak also supervised three doctorates (by Barbara Błaszczuk, Sławomir Szmatoła, and Jarosław Urbaniak) [6, 8]. In 2001, after a 10-year hiatus, Holy Cross Mountains University in Kielce established, within its former Faculty of Paedagogy (which simultaneously changed its name to Faculty of Paedagogy and Health Sciences), an Institute of Medical Education, with the staff formed of former employees of the Institute of Clinical Medicine [9]. Among them was Stanisław Nowak, now holding a position of Professor Extraordinarius. When the Institute of Medical Education was transformed into the Faculty of Health Sciences with three institutes, Nowak also became the director of the Institute of Public Health and head of the Institute's Division of Prevention of Nervous System Disorders. When the decision was made to issue a trade periodical, he accepted the new challenge as the Editor-in-Chief of "Studia Medyczne Akademii Świętokrzyskiej" [Medical Studies of Holy Cross Mts. University], of which Volume 1 appeared in 2003. The circle of active contributors included not only his friends and acquaintances, researchers from the institute or resident doctors, but also members of his family, including his two sons: Przemysław, an education theorist, and Wojciech, a medical doctor. In six volumes (Volume 6 was published posthumously) Stanisław Nowak authored or co-authored a total of 15 articles [10, 11].

As a medical practitioner, he dealt with a group of disorders that were challenging to diagnose and treat. His patients came in all ages, from small children with paralysed limbs through adults with epilepsy to elderly people with atherosclerotic changes. Those whom the treatment would not help and who were strong enough to give up treatment or had misunderstood the doctor's intentions and looked for medical advice elsewhere would not come back to his office, but new visitors kept appearing. The following poem appears to be a prayer:

Lotem sensu
w przestrzeń nieba
wzbij się dzisiaj
jak zjawienie
i obietaj
tam będącym
że przywrócisz

prawdę znaku
a powrotem
chwała będzie
wszystkich którym
dasz nadzieję

*Wiersz „Lot sensu” w zbiorce
„Intymność nieznana” 2001 (s. 12).*

A flight of sense
into the vast sky
soar today
as an advent
and so promise
those who are there
to restore
truth of the sign
the return
will be the glory
of all those who
you give hope to*

*“Lot sensu” [Flight of sense]
in the volume “Intymność nieznana”
[Intimacy unknown] 2001 (p. 12).*

At the same time, other poems reveal a keen sense of observation and healthy criticism beyond emotional involvement. Apart from a circle of friends, such writing could not bring him popularity among a scientific community whose members, like most people, highly treasure their own pride. Did they know him and his works well enough to have also read this poem with a tinge of sarcasm?

Komórki nerwowe mogą się odnawiać
O czym zresztą kiedyś już jasno pisałeś
Głównie te z obrębu płata skroniowego
Gdzie obszar pamięci jest bardzo złożony
Ale neurocyty i innych regionów
Też regenerują zapewne w cichości
Tak mówi kliniczne twoje doświadczenie
Głównie po udarach mózgowych wszelakich
Konieczne jest jednak leków stosowanie
W ocenie całości istoty człowieka
Nie tylko patrzeć na śródbłona ślady
Co jest zawężeniem wstecznym w naszej erze
A teoretycy konieczni zwyczajnie
Klinikę chcą łączyć z preparatu śladem
Uogólnień więcej szybko przekazują
Z narastaniem wieku własnego niestety
Stoi autorytet z pamięcią zawodną
Groteskowe gesty czyniąc teatralne
Powtarza przypuszczam mniemam lub wnioskuje
Wspominając czasy gdy dłoń ścisnął prawą
Temu co otrzymał noblowską nagrodę
Zebrani życzliwi ale wprost wnioskuje

*The English translations of the poems are informative rather than poetic.

Że był to życiowy sukces referenta
 Jakby po angielsku z sali się wynoszą
 Przepraszając w duchu za nietakt konieczny
 Dający im jednak jakby rozgrzeszenie
*Wiersz „Pamięć kodowana” w zbiorze
 „Pamięć kodowana” 2001 (s. 185).*

Nerve cells can renew themselves
 That you certainly stated clearly once
 Mostly those within the frontal lobe
 Where the memory area is very complex
 But neurocytes from other regions, too,
 Probably regenerate quietly
 Thus speaks your clinical experience
 Mainly following all kinds of strokes
 However, medication therapy is necessary
 To evaluate the human essence in its entirety
 Rather than just looking at endothelial traces
 Which, in our era, is a backward restriction
 And the necessary theoreticians ordinarily
 Want to merge the clinic with traces of the slide
 They quickly impart more generalisations
 With their unfortunately advancing age
 An authority stands with a failing memory
 Making grotesque theatrical gestures
 Repeating “I suppose”, “I gather”, or “I conclude”
 Remembering the time when he himself shook
 The right hand of the Nobel Prize man
 The listeners are kind but draw the straight
 conclusion
 That this was the speaker’s lifetime
 accomplishment
 They take the French leave out of the lecture hall
 Apologising in thought for the necessary gaffe
 That, however, gives them a kind of absolution
*“Pamięć kodowana” [Coded memory] in the volume
 “Pamięć kodowana” [Coded memory] 2001 (p. 185).*

In prose, he wrote, inter alia, “Other than that, time can also alter the clinical picture. There are «equipment» doctors, who are happy to rely on one examination report. This is primitive, arrogant, and irresponsible! Patients describing new symptoms are usually in the right. You just need to get down and listen to them and consider the patient’s remarks in your medical thinking and management of the case” [12]. He would sometimes criticise conference participants, “Nowadays, without pharmaceutical companies, there would not be so many sessions or new drug research programmes. Some «routine» conference speakers have been repeating «the same» for almost 10 years, not even knowing (?) that they have grown boring” [12]. The appreciation of a few more biographical details will reveal self-irony in the poem above. As Head of the Neurology Department in Kielce, conducting collaborative research on the medicinal use of prostaglandins with the Institute of Pharmacology of Cracow Medical University, Stanisław Nowak took

part in a team academic trip to England at the invitation of Prof. John Robert Vane, a member of the team who received the 1982 Nobel prize in medicine and physiology for unravelling the mechanism of action of aspirin and prostacyclin. Several years had passed between that trip and the poetic expression and even more since scientific meetings organised in Warsaw by the respected master tutor Prof. Anatol Dowżenko, and yet despite a need for authorities and the presence of apparently numerous authority wannabes, the author did not seem to notice them. Perhaps the paucity of authorities was a broader problem extending beyond professional life? Living in contemporaneity and contributing to it, the poet sighed sceptically:

Głos się załamał
 ostatni
 i wielki
 zostały szeptu
 nicością
 znaczone

*Wiersz „Szeptu nicości” w zbiorze
 „Intymność nieznaną” 2001 (s. 181).*

The voice broke
 Last
 And great
 What is left is whispers
 Marked by
 Nihilism

*“Szeptu nicości” [Whispers of nihilism] in the
 volume “Intymność nieznaną”
 [Intimacy unknown] 2001 (p. 181).*

Stanisław Nowak was not only a medical practitioner with an academic background and approach to disease, but he also could and would “sell” what he knew in a way accessible to non-medical readers. “Cierpienie i nadzieja” [The suffering and hope] is a popular science work published in 2003 and designed to be read by, as the introduction states, “everyone. One of the main goals is to stress that it is possible to influence our health. [...] It will merely be an attempt at medical interpretation based on 40 years of my clinical experience” [12]. Even though time has passed, it is still a good compendium for patients and their families.

An additional experience for Stanisław Nowak was undoubtedly his involvement with clerical and consultative duties: from 1980 onwards he was the regional consultant for neurology, and from 1999 he sat at the Bioethical Committee of the Regional Council of Physicians, Surgeons, and Dentists. He was sociable and active in the community as well as being a recognised person and the recipient of awards (including multiple awards from the Ministry of Health and the head of Cracow Medical University). In return for his involvement, he received, among others, the

Knight's Cross of the order of Polonia Restituta and the Dr Henryk Jordan Memorial Medal. Because he liked teamwork and appreciated the exchange of views, he held memberships in various societies, committees, and foundations, leading some of them. The most frequent mentions are of the Polish Neurological Society (head of the Kielce Branch from 1998), Polish Society of Clinical Neurophysiology (member of the Praesidium of the Board from 2001, head of the Holy Cross Mts. Branch from 1996, and head of the Electroencephalography Section), Epileptology Foundation in Warsaw (member in the years 1985–2002), Epilepsy Committee, Committee for Neurological Sciences at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, and the Polish Society for Sleep Research [1–5].

He knew how to get others to share their confidences, which he would note down, and he later published some of them (anonymised and with unobtrusive commentary), for example, in the book "Sny przepowiadające przyszłość" [Future-telling dreams] and probably in part also in the reportage collection "Kobieta otwarta" [The open woman] (for adult and mature readers). He admitted that stories of others also inspired him to write poems. Among his hobbies, he usually listed literature, painting, music, and lawn tennis, but, essentially, he was largely interested in Man. He lived and relaxed among people, but he could also fend for himself. He managed people, served them, earned money on them, played with them, and advised and listened to them "under diverse circumstances, formal or otherwise, in cold and heat, in the mountains and by the sea, in Poland and abroad" [13]. He showed an insightful image of those he would meet along the way, defiant and feckless, uneducated and intellectual, small ones who were adamant in their misery and those with great potential, who had grown small in the face of illness. He liked to portray women in his writings. He loyally appreciated the knowledge, mission, and genuine involvement in work to realise the mission in people from all walks of life related to medicine. As an academic teacher and head of a hospital ward, he shared his knowledge with the younger generations of medical professionals both directly and as a (co-) author of textbooks and articles. Even so, as a poet, he shared a certain ill-defined regret:

Jak wiatr wszechmocny i utajniony
Pędzisz niesiony życia wirami
Chcąc znaleźć siebie zagubionego
W przestworzach które obce ci były
Spotykasz własne jakby odmiany
Nawet się mylisz w rozpoznawaniu
Lecz nie ty jesteś w obiektach cudzych
Które w milczeniu ruch przeczzeń dają
*Wiersz „Odbicia cienie”
w zbiorunku „Pamięć kodowana” 2001 (s. 110).*

Like an almighty and covert wind
You speed ahead on life's whirls
Trying to find your lost self
In the skies that were alien to you
You meet some transformations of yourself
You are even mistaken in the recognition
But that is not you in someone else's objects
That silently give the motion of negations
*“Odbicia cienie” [Shadows of reflection] in the volume
“Pamięć kodowana” [Coded memory] 2001 (p. 110).*

A pioneer of "biotechnology" and technologisation of medicine in Kielce, his writing would always (and only those who knew him personally know whether his actions paralleled his words) fend for the weak, those harmed by fate, and those sick. He provided information and recommendations but would not limit himself to that. Sometimes he would just say that he understood. And that meant more than in-your-face ubiquitous know-it-all advice. This empathetic attitude is felt by the poem below, in which the poet, as a doctor, assigned the role of a protagonist (probably) to a patient he was advising:

Przekazał życzenia
by jeść samodzielnie
ogolić się
i uklon
złożyć sąsiadowi
ale to niestety
jest już niemożliwe
bo trwała choroba
niweczy
zamiary

*Wiersz „Życzenia” w zbiorunku
„Pieśni zamieranie” 2001 (s. 79).*

He conveyed the wish
To eat unassisted
Shave
And give regards
To a neighbour,
But this
Is impossible now
As the permanent disease
Turns intentions
To rust
“Życzenia” [Wishes] in the volume “Pieśni zamieranie” [Withering of the song] 2001 (p. 79).

Was the next monologue, below, also spoken by a patient? Was it a shout? A whisper? A plea? A denial of standards? Or perhaps silence perceived by the poet's sensitivity and couched in a simple message? And, if not any of these, an attempt to cope with personal illness?

Pragnę
 przewartościować wartościowanie
 przekreślić diagnozę uczonego człowieka
 wzgardzić litością fałszywych twórców
 poderwać się
 unieść
 wyzdrowieć
 pragnę

*Wiersz „Siła przetrwania” w zbioriku
 „Pieśni zamieranie” 2001 (s. 28).*

I wish
 To reevaluate valuation
 Cancel the diagnosis of the learned man
 Scorn pity from bogus authors
 Rise
 Soar
 Recover
 I wish

*“Siła przetrwania” [Power to survive]
 in the volume “Pieśni zamieranie”
 [Withering of the song] 2001 (p. 28).*

Deeply entrenched in traditional Polish folk culture, he was not fully prepared to confront the magnitude of changes ushered in by the era of globalism, the blind search for new values, booming systems of remotely controlled mentality and distorted ideals, which he deplored in simple words:

Gromada przeciętności
 ludzkiego wymiaru
 rozrasta się
 pęcznieje
 grozi eksplozją
 głupoty

*Wiersz „Eksplozja” w zbioriku
 „Oczy uzdrowienia” 2001 (s. 144).*

The ruck of mediocrity
 Of the human dimension
 Growing bigger
 Swelling up
 Threatening to explode
 Into stupidity

*“Eksplozja” [Explosion] in the volume
 “Oczy uzdrowienia” [Eyes of healing] 2001 (p. 144).*

The essence of life, a full, individualist life in harmony with one's environment, a life marked by fascination with nature and a genuine perception of humanity (the glorification of good, the naming and condemnation of evil) is interwoven in Stanisław Nowak's work with images, or rather threats, of death:

Zrabowane serce rzuciłeś na drodze
 Która długa była z szczęścia oznakami
 Później własne serce raniłeś śmiertelnie
 Zamykając dramat nadludzkiej wielkości
 A wokół schło wszystko co zielone było
 Z trzaskaniem złowieszczym
 Bo śmierć szła pośpiesznie

*Wiersz „Spacer śmierci” w zbioriku
 „Pieśni zamieranie” 2001 (s. 50).*

You dumped a stolen heart on the road
 Which was long with signs of happiness
 Then your own heart you wounded lethally
 Closing a drama of superhuman greatness
 And around you all that was green was drying up
 With sinister cracking sounds
 As death was approaching hastily
*“Spacer śmierci” [Death's walk] in the volume
 “Pieśni zamieranie” [Withering of the song] 2001 (p. 50).*

“Departure from this world may take on diverse forms and usually comes unwanted. Additionally, it is also unpredictable. Interestingly, while we know about the inescapability of death, we really seldom give it a thought in everyday life. Nature, so blunt and ruthless, this time creates a kind of a firewall in our memory, a surrogate of the necessary mercy” [12]. Many years before his death, but living in its constant presence, receiving clinical information, watching his younger and older patients dying, watching their helplessness in the face of destruction of the imperfect nature and inability to preserve what appeared important to them (and to him as well), Stanisław Nowak tersely summed up human life with some prophetic undertones:

Jesteś tylko zeschniętą gałęzią stracenia
 Która była kiedyś zielonością zdobna
 Przetrwasz krótką chwilę a później upadły
 Ziemi nawet śladu istnienia nie dając
 Przeszłość jest bez znaku choćby przypomnienia
 Niosąc nicość szarą w zakamarkach losu

*Wiersz „Gałązka upadła” w zbioriku
 „Pamięć kodowana” 2001 (s. 52).*

You are only a dried-up branch of perdition
 That once was adorned with green
 You will last a short while and then, fallen,
 Not giving Earth even a trace of existence
 The past has no signs even of remembering
 Carrying grey nihility in fate's nooks and crannies
*“Gałązka upadła” [A fallen twig] in the volume
 “Pamięć kodowana” [Coded memory] 2001 (p. 52).*

Stanisław Nowak died on 18 June 2007, before his 71st birthday. The year 2020 marks the 13th anniversary

sary of his death and 23th of his literary debut [2–5]. Professional medical publications, showing his considerable involvement, are now – naturally – only of historical importance. His organisational work paved the way for new structures that often represented substantial departures from the original ideas. His personal website is no longer online. What is left is obituaries, pithy entries in dictionaries and encyclopaedias, brief review notes, and seventeen volumes that look chic on library shelves, filled with thought framed as postmodernist poetry. They hide a life story coded in words... Do we still remember?

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Nowak Stanisław. In: Judycki Z, Siwek J. Kto jest kim w Kielcach. Oficyna Wydawnicza Kucharski, Toruń 2002; 1: 118-9.
2. Błaszczak B. Prof. dr hab. n. med. Stanisław Nowak (1936–2007) [Professor Dr Habil. Stanisław Nowak, MD (1936–2007)]. *Studia Medyczne Akademii Świętokrzyskiej* 2007; 6: 97-8; http://www.ujk.edu.pl/studiamedyczne/doc/stud_med_t_6.pdf.
3. Błaszczak B. Profesor dr hab. n. med. Stanisław Nowak 1936–2007. *Epileptologia* 2007; 15: 273-274.
4. Stanisław Nowak – neurolog. In: [naukowy.pl](http://encyklopedia.naukowy.pl/Stanislaw_Nowak_(neurolog)); [http://encyklopedia.naukowy.pl/Stanislaw_Nowak_\(neurolog\)](http://encyklopedia.naukowy.pl/Stanislaw_Nowak_(neurolog)).
5. Stanisław Nowak (neurolog). In: Wikipedia. Wolna encyklopedia; [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanislaw_Nowak_\(neurolog\)](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanislaw_Nowak_(neurolog)).
6. Nowak S. Historia Klinicznego Oddziału Neurologii i Kliniki Neurologicznej w Kielcach w latach 1980–2001 [History of Clinical Neurology in Kielce in the years 1980–2001]. *Studia Medyczne Akademii Świętokrzyskiej* 2007; 5: 71-77; http://www.ujk.edu.pl/studiamedyczne/doc/stud_med_t_5.pdf.
7. Nowak S., Braziewicz J., Braziewicz E., Płoskonka J. Oznaczanie stężeń pierwiastków śladowych w płynie mózgowo-rdzeniowym przy pomocy charakterystycznego promieniowania X, wzbudzanego przez cząstki naładowane. *Neurol Neurochir Pol* 1984; 5: 435-442.
8. dr hab. Stanisław Nowak (nie żyje). In: *Nauka Polska. Ludzie Nauki*; <http://nauka-polska.pl/dhtml/raporty/ludzie-Nauki?rtype=opis&objectId=67474&lang=pl>.
9. Głuszek S, Nowak-Starz G, Szpringer M. Wydział Nauk o Zdrowiu. In: *Droga do Uniwersytetu: 1969–2009*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego Jana Kochanowskiego, Kielce 2009; 153-81.
10. Nowak J. „Studia Medyczne” – „Medical Studies” w latach 2003–2015 jako przykład ewolucyjnego rozwoju czasopisma uczelnianego: wybrane zagadnienia [“Studia Medyczne” – “Medical Studies” in the years 2003–2015 – an example of evolutionary development of a university journal: selected issues]. *Forum Bibliotek Medycznych* 2016; 9: 319-354; http://cybra.lodz.pl/Content/14994/319_pdfsam_FBM2016_nr1aa.pdf.
11. Nowak J. „Medical Studies”/„Studia Medyczne” w latach 2003–2016: prezentacja i bibliografia zawartości kwartalnika afiliowanego przez Wydział Lekarski i Nauk o Zdrowiu Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach [“Medical Studies”/„Studia Medyczne” between 2003–2016: bibliography and presentation of the content of a quarterly magazine affiliated by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce]. *Rocznik Biblioteki Uniwersyteckiej* 2017; 4–5 [in print].
12. Nowak S. *Cierpienie i nadzieja*. Wydawnictwo Nowy Świat, Warszawa 2003.
13. Nowak S. *Sny przepowiadające przyszłość*. Wydawnictwo Nowy Świat, Warszawa 2005.

Address for correspondence

Joanna Nowak MSc
Library
Jan Kochanowski University
ul. Uniwersytecka 19, 25-406 Kielce, Poland
E-mail: joanna-no@wp.pl