

**JOURNAL**

of Health Inequalities

# Dr Mateusz Zatonski: his scientific life and outstanding contribution to tobacco control and public health in Europe

Florin Mihaltan<sup>1,2</sup>, Cornel Radu-Loghin<sup>2</sup>, Krzysztof Przewozniak<sup>2,3</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Pneumology, “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania<sup>2</sup>European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP), Brussels, Belgium<sup>3</sup>Maria Skłodowska-Curie National Research Institute of Oncology, Warsaw, Poland

**ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:** Florin Mihaltan, Department of Pneumology, “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: [mihaltan@starnets.ro](mailto:mihaltan@starnets.ro)

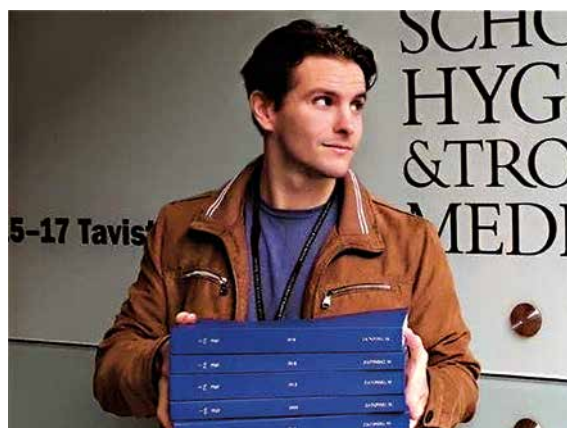
This paper is based on the text of laudation in memoriam for the ENSP Award to Dr Mateusz Zatonski for his outstanding contribution to tobacco control, presented by Professor Florin Mihaltan, President of the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention, during the ENSP Youth Tobacco Control Leadership School in Warsaw, Poland on 14–16 November 2022.

Mateusz was a vibrant and talented public health scholar, who, in his short career, had already made a notable impact in the field of tobacco control and public health in Europe and globally. He had many roles and was wearing many complementary hats, which made him such a successful young leader and an effective collaborator. Without doubt, Mateusz would have been here with us today if his illness had not taken him from us far too soon.

Mateusz was born in 1987, in the city of Nadarzyn, just south of Warsaw, the fifth and youngest son of Professor Witold and Mrs Jadwiga Zatoński. Mateusz’s first passions were film, literature, history, and languages. His interest in these subjects led him far from his native Poland, first to study linguistics at Oxford, where he was also engaged in supporting delivery of Polish language seminars to fellow students.

Mateusz then moved with his future wife, Aleksandra Herbec, to Glasgow, Scotland to pursue academic study of film, history, and politics, from which he graduated with a first-class Master of Arts (Hons) degree in history and politics at the University of Glasgow. As a part of his undergraduate degree, he was selected to take part in a year abroad programme at the University of California at Berkeley.

There were many crossroads on Mateusz’s professional journey that ultimately led him to pursue a career in



Public Health. First, in 2011 Mateusz won a very prestigious scholarship to attend the College of Europe, preparing future leaders for work at the offices of the European Union. However, Mateusz’s academic passions made him remain in the UK, where he first completed a Master of Arts (MA) with distinction in Central and South-East European Studies from University College London. Over the course of his studies, his focus broadened from history and politics to public health, inspired by his father’s work as an eminent global public health leader, cancer epidemiologist, and tobacco control expert. Following his MA, he joined the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, where he studied for a Master of Science in public health followed by a PhD in public health policy and history, supervised by Professor Martin McKee. His PhD research project investigated the history of tobacco control in Central and Eastern Europe during the late Communist and early post-Communist period. The case study was Poland, the country which in the year



1980 had one of the highest tobacco consumption levels in the world (photo above).

Mateusz's academic career brought many accolades and prizes. As a student in Glasgow, he won the James Kellas Prize for the best joint honours student in politics, and in 2018, the Society for the Social History of Medicine awarded him the Roy Porter Student Essay Prize for the best original essay in the social history of medicine. In 2019, Mateusz was awarded a European Union Young Forum Gastein scholarship for young European health professionals to participate in the European Health Forum Gastein. While studying for his PhD, his excellence in research led to visiting fellowships and scholarships at institutions including Harvard and the University of California in San Francisco. He then joined the University of Bath in 2019, becoming a research fellow with the Tobacco Control Research Group led by Professor Anna Gilmore, and through them contributing research to the global tobacco industry watchdog, STOP. In May 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognised Dr Mateusz Zatoński's contribution to tobacco control efforts in Europe and globally with a posthumous honour and WHO World No Tobacco Day Medal. To cherish and honour the wonderful person he was, the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention, the biggest network of tobacco control organisations, institutions, and advocates in the European region of the WHO, also decided to highlight his achievements with the ENSP Award for Outstanding Contribution to Tobacco Control (photo above). The Award-giving ceremony took place during the first ENSP Youth Tobacco Control Leadership School (YTCLS), which was collaboratively organised in Warsaw between 14 and 16 November 2022 by ENSP, University of Southern California in Los Angeles and the National Research Institute of Oncology, Foundation "Smart Health – Health in 3D", all based in Warsaw. To preserve the legacy of the work

of Dr Mateusz Zatoński, ENSP also made the decision to commemorate the next YTCLS events with his name.

At the University of Bath, Mateusz led the team devoted to researching the influence of the tobacco industry on policy at global and national levels, and developing ways to address this. His work included collaborations with the tobacco control teams in South Africa. He was also Vice President of the Health Promotion Foundation in Warsaw, representing the Foundation at conferences worldwide and in many national and international research and educational projects, including those funded by the Global Bridges grant programme and by the European Union Horizon grant program EUREST-PLUS ITC Europe Survey coordinated by ENSP, for which he played one of the crucial roles in analysing the impact of flavours on tobacco use and attitudes of European smokers towards banning menthol and other flavours in tobacco products. Mateusz was also assistant editor of the *Journal of Health Inequalities* through his academic role at the President Stanisław Wojciechowski Calisia University in Kalisz, Poland.

Mateusz was a prolific writer: as well as writing and contributing to over 60 academic papers and articles, he produced numerous blogs, conference presentations, and book chapters. Below is presented a selected list of his scientific papers, research reports, and other publications. For his publications as associate fellow of the Calisia University, he was awarded over 153 Impact Factor points and 2937 points of the Polish Ministry of Science and Education. He was also an inspiring teacher, always keen to support other early career researchers and supervising several postgraduate students. He presented his research at conferences and events around the world, applying his talent to languages which included Czech, English, French, Italian, and Russian in addition to his native Polish.

Mateusz's multi-faceted interests were reflected in his work beyond academic research, which encompassed journal editing, translation, political research, and communications. He excelled in bringing together and supporting networks of like-minded people, particularly those connected by Eastern European social and political history. He was a board member for the Platform Ukraine multidisciplinary network; a co-founder and social media officer for Crossing the Baltic online magazine; managing editor for the academic journal *Slovo*; and an editor with the Museum for the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

Those who worked with him have described him as 'an exceptional colleague' and 'a role-model', who did 'meaningful research [that will] improve the lives of many people'. His PhD supervisor, Professor Martin McKee of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, described his death as 'a huge loss for tobacco control and for public health more generally'. Professor Anna Gilmore, Director of Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, remembers him as 'an amazing

diplomat – able to negotiate complex and divisive issues with intelligence, charm, and humour’, and ‘not only a truly brilliant researcher, but above all a wonderful human being’.

While Mateusz’s CV and publication list attest to his numerous academic achievements, those who worked with him remember first and foremost an immensely kind, generous, engaging, and passionate friend. Professor Martin McKee noted that ‘his smile lit up any room he entered and, since his death, so many people have recalled his many acts of kindness. He was one of the nicest people I have ever had the good fortune to know’.

His colleagues recall ‘a sweet spirit’ who was ‘a dream to work with and an absolute gem of a person. Unwaveringly positive, calm, constructive, kind, thoughtful, and fun’. They remember ‘his genuine kindness and willingness to help out’, and as someone who ‘always had time for a word or a joke in the office’, was ‘full of energy and positivity’, and who had an ‘unwavering instinct to include others and treat all equally’. Above all, Mateusz was someone whose ‘zest for life and living it fully was so apparent’, ‘an extraordinary person, tremendous colleague, and dear friend’. He bore his illness with his amazing strength and grace, continuing to work and live life to the full for as long as he was able.

As attested by his wife, Aleksandra, when faced with the impossible challenge last year, Mateusz remained unbreakable. Everyone who had a chance to meet him knew he was the bearer of good news and a positive force in all endeavours. His positive outlook on life and gene-

rosity had no limits till the very end. Even after receiving his diagnosis in May 2021, Mateusz had no doubts and hesitations about to continue being professionally active and working alongside his colleagues in the UK and worldwide. It is a great testimony that he never stopped wanting to contribute and to learn and mentor, and he remained devoted to the cause and ideals of public health and tobacco control.

Mateusz often reflected on how lucky and privileged he had been in life, to be able to do what he truly loved and felt passionate about, to work towards improving human lives, and to be surrounded by absolutely wonderful and inspiring colleagues that he admired. He also knew that the work that he had started would be continued by his colleagues and friends.

Mateusz had been engaged with the wider ENSP family for many years. First, from the start of his adult life he accompanied his father, Witold Zatoński, to many ENSP meetings. In the most recent years, together with his wife, Dr Aleksandra Herbec, and with Dr Krzysztof Przewoźniak, Mateusz represented Poland in the work of ENSP. He contributed to a series of publications, which are part of the important history of classical epidemiological research on the tobacco-related behaviours of Europeans.

The death of Mateusz brought an immense loss to his family, friends, as well as to the public health and tobacco control community. We take consolation in knowing just what an incredibly valuable impact Mateusz had in his relatively short, but rich in achievements and experiences, lifetime.

### Ten major scientific publications of Dr Mateusz Zatoński

1. Kyriakos CN, Zatoński MZ, Filippidis FT. Flavour capsule cigarette use and perceptions: a systematic review. *Tob Control* 2021; doi: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2021-056837.
2. Zatoński WA, Zatoński M, Janik-Koncewicz K, Wojtyła A. Alcohol-related deaths in Poland during a period of weakening alcohol control measures. *JAMA* 2021; 325(11): 1108-1109.
3. Zatoński WA, Zatoński MZ, Janik-Koncewicz K, McKee M. Alcohol-related liver cirrhosis in Poland: the reservoir effect. *Lancet Gastroenterol Hepatol* 2020; 5(12): 1035.
4. Zatoński M. Review of Poisonous Pandas: Matthew Kohrman, Gan Quan, Liu Wennan, and Robert N. Proctor, eds. *Poisonous Pandas: Chinese Cigarette Manufacturing in Critical Historical Perspectives*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018. *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 2020; 34(1): 176-178.
5. Zatoński M, Herbec A, Zatoński W, Janik-Koncewicz K, Driezen P, Demjén T, Fernández E, Fong GT, Quah ACK, Kyriakos CN, McNeill A, Willemsen M, Mons U, Tountas Y, Trofor A, Vardavas CI, Przewoźniak K, the EUREST-PLUS Consortium. Cessation behaviours among smokers of menthol and flavoured cigarettes following the implementation of the EU Tobacco Products Directive: findings from the EUREST-PLUS ITC Europe Surveys. *Eur J Public Health* 2020; 30 (Suppl 3): iii34–iii37.
6. Zatoński M, Hawkins B, McKee M. Framing the policy debate over spirits excise tax in Poland. *Health Promotion International* 2018; 33(3): 515–524.
7. Zatoński WA, Zatoński M. Poland’s rapid lung cancer decline in the years 1990-2016. The first step towards the eradication of lung cancer in Poland. *Health Prob Civil* 2017; 11(4): 211-225.
8. Zatoński WA, Zatoński M. ‘Sytuacja zdrowotna’ [The health situation]. In: Noszczyk W (ed.). *Dzieje medycyny w Polsce [The history of medicine in Poland]*. Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, Warszawa 2016.
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10. Zatoński W, Zatoński M. Cytisine versus Nicotine for Smoking Cessation. *N Engl J Med* 2015; 372(11): 1072.