

## Professor Stanisław Mlekodaj (1927–2021)

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Stanisław Mlekodaj, son of Stanisław and Maria (née Leśniak), was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1927 in Rabka. In 1941, he finished primary school in his hometown. During the German occupation he was an apprentice and then a technical worker at the Post Office in Rabka supervised by the Germans [1]. Due to the access to German communication devices, including the equipment of the land forces, in 1943 he was sworn in as a member of the Operational Group of Cieszyn Silesia of the Home Army [2]. After World War II, in 1948, he obtained the matriculation certificate at the Secondary School in Rabka, and began studies at the Faculty of Medicine of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. During his studies, he was a member of the Zakopane branch of the AZS Ski Section, and a member of the national ski team [3]. He obtained his doctor's diploma (no. L292/88/53) in July 1953 and in September he started working as an assistant in the surgical ward of the City Hospital in Rabka, and at the same time managed the Municipal Emergency Station. From March 1955, he worked first as an assistant and then an assistant professor at the Surgical Department of the Thoracic Surgical Sanatorium in Zakopane, headed by one of the outstanding Polish pioneers of thoracic surgery, Professor Wit Rzepecki. In the years 1958–1961 he was the head of this institution [4]. In 1958, Stanisław Mlekodaj obtained the title of a specialist in thoracic surgery [5], and the following year he went on a scientific internship with outstanding European pioneers of thoracic surgery at surgical clinics in Utrecht (Prof. Joan Frans Nuboer), in Munich (Prof. Rudolf Zenker) and in Düsseldorf (Prof. Ernst Derra).

In addition to his clinical activity, Stanisław Mlekodaj worked in the research field obtaining a doctoral degree in 1961, awarded by the Council of the Medical Faculty of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków on the basis of an examination and thesis entitled *Bronchial fistula after lung tissue resection*, and then in November 1968 a postdoctoral degree in medical sciences in the field of thoracic surgery. This degree was awarded by the Council of the Medical Faculty of the Medical Academy in Gdańsk by the resolution of 28<sup>th</sup> November 1968, on the basis of scientific achievements and dissertation entitled *Surgical treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis*. In May 1978 he was appointed by the Minister of Health and Social Welfare to the position of associate professor, and in 1988 he was awarded the title of full professor.

In October 1961, Stanisław Mlekodaj took the position of the head of the surgical department at Dr. Anka National Tuberculosis Sanatorium, and in 1963 he was appointed the administrator of this facility. The surgical department organized and started the surgical treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis and neoplastic lesions of the chest organs. He also organized an experimental surgery department in cooperation with Professor Kazimierz Dębicki from the

Medical Academy in Gdańsk. Using an innovative set for extracorporeal circulation apparatus constructed, among others, by Professor Jan Moll, Stanisław Mlekodaj started experimental studies on animals (dogs) in the field of controlled hypothermia in cooperation with surgeons and anaesthesiologists from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Surgical Clinic of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk. He thus contributed to the preparation of the team for open heart surgery [6].

In April 1970, Stanisław Mlekodaj was appointed the Director of the Institute of Surgery at the Medical Academy of Gdańsk and the head of the Department of Thoracic Surgery. It was a unanimous decision of the university senate, and the opinions emphasized the candidate's extraordinary organizational skills, extensive knowledge and surgical talent [7]. In the Department of Thoracic Surgery of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk, Stanisław Mlekodaj introduced new surgical techniques for lung cancer treatment, surgery of the trachea and large bronchi, and in the department of cardiovascular surgery, treatment of heart defects with extracorporeal circulation was started (Figure 1). Thanks to his brave decisions as the Director of the Institute of Surgery of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk, many workers injured during the clashes with the militia during the bloody riots in December 1970, admitted to the clinics of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk, avoided imprisonment [8].

In August 1971, Stanisław Mlekodaj established cooperation with Polish Ocean Lines and was the head of the outpatient surgical clinic on the ship *MS Batory* on a cruise to Canada. He also provided emergency medical assistance in other units at sea where there was no doctor present, gaining trust for the Institute of Surgery of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk.

In February 1979, Stanisław Mlekodaj was appointed by the Minister of Health and Social Welfare to the position of the Director of the Institute of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases in Warsaw and the head of the Surgery Clinic at this Institute. After taking up the position, he made organizational changes, separating the thoracic surgery ward, the cardiac surgery ward and the general surgery ward. The number of procedures performed within the chest increased, and new surgical techniques and minimally invasive procedures as well as a new model of a consultation card were introduced [9].

In May 1981, Professor Mlekodaj was appointed Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, being responsible for scientific research in medicine and higher education. He resigned from his position in November 1983.





**Figure 1.** Handing over the Polystan cardiopulmonary bypass as a “Gift of Dziennik Bałtycki” for the Medical Academy of Gdańsk. From the left: Prof. Stanisław Mlekodaj – director of the Institute of Surgery of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk

In the years 1976–1979 he was a regional surgery consultant for the provinces of Gdańsk, Elbląg, Bydgoszcz, Toruń and Słupsk, and from February 1979 he was the chairman of the National Specialist Team in Thoracic Surgery [10]. He also developed and implemented the “National Programme of Surgical Treatment of Lung Cancer”.

From 1957 he was a member of the Society of Polish Surgeons, and in 1974 he was elected the chairman of its Section of Thoracic, Heart and Vessel Surgeons. In 1974, he organized the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of this section in Gdańsk. In 2014 he was awarded the title of an honorary member of the Polish Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons.

Under the supervision of Professor Stanisław Mlekodaj, 14 assistants obtained the second degree of specialization in surgery or thoracic surgery. He supervised 12 doctoral dissertations and 4 habilitation theses. He finished active professional work in surgery in 1997, after reaching retirement age.

Professor Stanisław Mlekodaj died in Warsaw on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2021; his ashes were buried in the cemetery in Rabka.

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*Anna Paprocka-Lipińska MD, PhD,  
Department of Medical Ethics, Medical University  
of Gdansk, Gdansk, Poland*