

Professor Mirosława Narkiewicz (1931–2017) – biographical note

Kardiochirurgia i Torakochirurgia Polska 2017; 14 (4): 285-288



Fortune (which I helped a bit) gave me a chance to live in the fascinating golden half-century in the development of cardiac surgery. I am very thankful to it for my professional life scenario.

Mirosława Narkiewicz [1]

Mirosława Narkiewicz (maiden name: Broda) was born on 19th September 1931 in Łuck (Volhynia region, today in the Ukraine). She started her education in 1938, and during the war continued it in clandestine classes. She lived in her family town until 1943, then moved to Mościce near Tarnów, and from July 1945 she lived in Sopot with her parents and two younger brothers: Henryk and Zbigniew. She continued learning in a gymnasium, and then in Maria Skłodowska-Curie High School in Sopot, and after graduation in 1949, she began studies on the Medical Faculty of the Medical Academy in Gdańsk [2]. As a second-year student, she was employed as a demonstrator in the Department of Normal Anatomy led by Prof. Michał Reicher (Fig. 1). In July 1954, she obtained the medical diploma (medical authorisation no. 887/54).

After graduating, Mirosława Narkiewicz continued working in the Department of Anatomy as a junior assistant, focusing on the anatomy of the circulatory system in her academic pursuits. In 1954, she became a member of the Polish Anatomical Society. In the years 1954–1961, she worked also part time in the Clinic of Paediatric Surgery led by Prof. Romuald Sztaba. In October 1961, she obtained the second degree of specialisation in paediatric surgery. Her skills in paediatric surgery were later to become a great asset during the creation of a department dealing with congenital heart diseases in children. In January 1953, she married Olgierd Narkiewicz and took his surname. Soon, a son, Krzysztof, was born into the family. In 1964, Mirosława Narkiewicz earned the academic degree of Doctor of Medicine on the basis of an exam and an experimental dissertation: “Results of ligation of vena cava inferior above the renal veins in cats”. The aim of the study was to evaluate the possibility of formation of collateral circulation, and to analyse the types of renal function disorders and changes in the vena cava inferior after its ligation above the ostia of the renal veins.

In 1961, Mirosława Narkiewicz started working in the 2nd Surgical Clinic of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk (AMG) headed by Prof. Kazimierz Dębicki. Professor Dębicki,

an eminent surgeon who initiated the development of cardiac surgery in Gdańsk, in 1960 passed the leadership of the cardiac surgery subdepartment to Ass. Prof. Stanisław Sokół [3]. It was under his supervision that Mirosława Narkiewicz gained her first experiences in cardiac surgery. After the sudden, premature death of Stanisław Sokół in 1968, Dr. Narkiewicz became the leader of the team, performing cardiac surgery procedures in controlled hypothermia in children. Controlled hypothermia was then achieved using a rubber suit designed by Dr. Karol Oppeln-Bronikowski, the leader of the anaesthesiological team. At that time, the hospital could not perform cardiac surgery procedures using extracorporeal circulation due to the lack of appropriate equipment, but performed the whole scope of procedures which did not require perfusion. In 1970 (by a fortunate coincidence, as Prof. Narkiewicz often mentioned later), she had an opportunity to go for an internship in cardiac surgery in the Department of Thoracic Surgery of the Onze Lieve Vrouwe Gasthuis (OLVG) Hospital in Amsterdam, supervised by the pioneer of Dutch cardiac surgery, Prof.



Fig. 1. Mirosława Narkiewicz in 1950. From the collection of the Medical University of Gdańsk

Anton Gründeman [4]. A yearly internship abroad was then a major challenge due to disadvantageous socio-political circumstances, a difficult process of obtaining a passport and permit to leave the country and the problem of ensuring care to the family left in Poland. Prof. Narkiewicz mentioned that period in an interview given to one of the local newspapers in 2000: “[...] a few years earlier fortune had given me Mrs. Maria, who dedicated herself to housekeeping. Today, I think she also contributed to the development of cardiac surgery in Gdańsk” [5].

During the yearly internship, Mirosława Narkiewicz familiarised herself with the functioning of a cardiac surgery centre. In her report from that stay, she summarised the benefits in the following way: “learning new open heart surgery techniques and active participation in the work of the thoracic surgery department (surgical assistance, performing surgeries, supervising patients after open heart surgery in the ICU), learning the organisation of thoracic surgery departments and intensive care units, participation in experimental works on heart revascularization and so-called “stone heart” after open heart surgery, familiarisation with pre- and postgraduate training methods at Dutch medical universities and in hospitals, learning how to evaluate the patient’s condition, indications for the procedure and surgical risks using computer-based technologies” [6]. The stay of Mirosława Narkiewicz in the Netherlands turned out to be crucial for cardiac surgery in Gdańsk. Mirosława

Narkiewicz not only used the stay to gain new professional skills but also created long-lasting friendships with the whole family of Prof. Gründeman and many Dutch doctors and nurses. Prof. Anton Gründeman (1916–1996) first visited the Clinic of Thoracic, Cardiac and Vascular Surgery of the AMG in 1974, as the honorary guest of the Congress of the Thoracic and Vascular Section of the Association of Polish Surgeons. The visit resulted in a decision to donate an extracorporeal circulation machine by Pemco to the cardiac surgery centre in Gdańsk. After receiving the equipment and conducting a range of experimental procedures on animals, on 29th April 1975 the team led by Mirosława Narkiewicz performed the first cardiac surgery in Gdańsk using extracorporeal circulation. It was a repair of a defect in the interatrial septum in an 8-year-old girl [7]. This procedure began the new era in the development of cardiac surgery in Gdańsk. The first open heart procedures were a challenge to the whole team. Friedrich Mohr, a medicine student from Berlin, was present during one such operation, performed in 1975. In an interview he gave already as a professor and pioneer of German cardiac surgery, he stressed that the whole procedure performed by the team led by Mirosława Narkiewicz made such an impression on him that it was crucial for his future – it was then that he decided to become a cardiac surgeon [8]. A significant contribution to the development of cardiac surgery in Gdańsk was made by Dutch friends of Mirosława Narkiewicz. The support was not only scientific – regular visits of Prof. Gründeman and his team and enabling the training of the member of the Gdańsk team in two Dutch centres, in Amsterdam and Utrecht – but also included significant economic aid in the form of regular deliveries of donations from the Netherlands in the difficult period of Martial Law [9]. An article published in a Dutch newspaper entitled “A new charity initiative for Poland is desperately needed”, describing the



Fig. 2. Fragment of an article published in a Dutch newspaper from 13th October 1981 describing the first delivery of donations to Poland. Inscription below the photograph: “Mira Narkiewicz, cardiac surgeon, with a patient. Poland needs adhesive plaster for dressings.” From the collection of Gees Essing



Fig. 3. Celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the AMG From the left: Harry van der Lubbe (financial manager of the OLVG hospital in Amsterdam), Paul Gründeman (receiving the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland on behalf of absent Prof. Anton Gründeman), Prof. Mirosława Narkiewicz, Gees Essing (head nurse from the ICU of the OLVG hospital), Peter de Grote (manager of the OLVG hospital). Gdańsk, 1995. From the collection of Gees Essing



Fig. 4. Professor Mirosława Narkiewicz with the team of doctors from the Department and Clinic of the AMG. From the left: Dr. Piotr Bętlejewski, Dr. Cezary Klejnotowski, Dr. Bolesław Szołkowski, Dr. Andrzej Lipski, Dr. Jacek Juściński, Dr. Jan Rogowski, Prof. Mirosława Narkiewicz, Dr. Lech Anisimowicz, Dr. Maciej Brzeziński, Dr. Piotr Siondalski, Dr. Wojciech Pawliszak, Dr. Rafał Pawlaczyk. From the collection of Mirosława Narkiewicz

sad Polish reality, contained a photograph from a hospital room with Prof. Narkiewicz changing a dressing in a child after cardiac surgery (Fig. 2). In 1995, during the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk, the Dutch friends received national orders for their long-term help (Fig. 3).

In March 1980, the Central Qualification Committee for Medical Professionals at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister approved the resolution of the Medical Faculty of the AMG about awarding Mirosława Narkiewicz the degree of Habilitated Doctor of Medicine in cardiac surgery. The habilitation dissertation was titled: "Morphological and haemodynamic changes in aortic narrowing. Experimental studies." [10]. In 1982, Mirosława Narkiewicz was appointed Assistant Professor in the Clinic of Thoracic, Cardiac and Vascular Surgery, and in 1983 she became the Chancellor's Representative for Development of the Clinic of Cardiac Surgery. It was an organisational challenge aimed at creating a modern workplace for the cardiac surgery team.

In 1986, Mirosława Narkiewicz earned the title of a specialist in cardiac surgery. On 1st July 1987, after the division of the Clinic of Thoracic, Cardiac and Vascular Surgery, Ass. Prof. Mirosława Narkiewicz became the manager of the Cardiac Surgery Clinic of the Institute of Surgery of the AMG. In the same year, she was accepted as a member of the Cardiac Surgeons' Club. She was then the third woman in this prestigious club. After the establishment of the Institute of

Cardiology of the AMG, Ass. Prof. Mirosława Narkiewicz held the position of the Institute head for two first terms, in the years 1992–1998 (Fig. 4). In 1996, she was awarded the title of Associate Professor of the Medical Academy of Gdańsk.

The works aimed at the development of the Cardiac Surgery Clinic were successfully completed on 27th June 1996 with the opening of a new cardiac surgery theatre in the Department and Clinic of Cardiac Surgery belonging to the Cardiology Institute of the AMG and including three modern operating rooms named after K. Dębicki, S. Sokół and J. Pryczkowski, and an Intensive Postoperative Care Unit with ten beds. The new department contributed to further dynamic development of cardiac surgery in Gdańsk. In 1998, the number of procedures in extracorporeal circulation exceeded one thousand per year and Prof. Mirosława Narkiewicz, as the leader of the team, received the prize of the Cardiac Surgeons' Club called "Golden Scalpel", while the Council of the City of Gdańsk awarded her the Medal of Prince Mestwin II.

Professor Mirosława Narkiewicz built a cardiac surgery team and indicated the paths of scientific development of its members. She was the supervisor of specialisation in cardiac surgery for nine physicians, as well as the supervisor of ten doctoral theses and three habilitation dissertations. In 2001, she became an honorary member of the Association of Polish Surgeons and in 2003 an honorary member of the Polish Cardiac Society.

Professor Mirosława Narkiewicz had unique organisational skills and a knack of establishing interpersonal relationships and making friends. Under her leadership, the cardiac surgery department in Gdańsk became a relevant centre both in Poland and abroad. On 1st April 2002 she finished her intensive professional activity and retired. The last years of her life were marked by fighting an incurable illness. She died in Gdańsk on 19th May 2017.

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