

SIXTY YEARS OF MEDICAL SCHOOL IN TIMISOARA

Opening speech at the 60th Anniversary of the Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Timisoara

Dan V. Poenaru

About one month ago the gates of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" from Timisoara opened for the sixtieth time since the establishment of the Timisoara Medical School. We consider that 60 years may represent a lifetime, or at least the beginning of the descending slope in a person's life. This is not true for our medical school, which, for good reason, we consider to be in its prime, fully developing, with present and future plans that are well-designed and solid. But, before attempting for the future, we have the duty to remember the past. We must bring into the present those people who made this present possible, moreover the present constitutes the past of the future. This is the cycle of life.

It is known from the history that, after each war, people are throbbing with the euphoria of life that acutely yearns for its rebirth. Therefore, it is no wonder that in December 1944, according to the unanimous will and following reports of the Ministry of Education, Finances and Health, His Majesty King Mihai I signed the Decree-Law No. 660 that established through its first article, the foundation of the West University in Timisoara. This was composed from: Law School, Literature and Philosophy School, Science School, Human Medicine (those were our beginnings),-Veterinarian Medicine, Pharmacy and Theology.

As a de facto and de ipso founder of this University, as well as for other accomplishments that you are well aware of and therefore I will not mention now, the Senate of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" from Timisoara has decided to award His Majesty the title Doctor Honoris Causa. His Majesty's wish, as well as ours, to have the award ceremony today, could not be brought to reality, since their Majesties, the king and the queen, were not able to be present today. They have been engaged in a European tour of great importance for Romania that was planned long ago. That is why we must inform you

that the title will be bestowed in the spring of 2006, at a moment personally decided by His Majesty.

As we follow history steps, we find ourselves several months later, in May 4, 1945, when Health Minister of the time, Dr. Dumitru Bagdasar signed the Law No. 361, which is the fundamental functioning act for the Medical Faculty. After that, things entered the normal course. In July 15, festive opening ceremony took place, and in July 18, 1945, the newly born Faculty of Medicine started its activity. The first lecture, in Biophysics, was held in Notre Dame amphitheatre, which could not accommodate the large number of students animated by an ardent wish to change into worthy descendants of the great god Apollo, the physician. In the first months of functioning they had to move from one place to another, but starting October 1945, the Medical School obtained the building "Banatia", afterwards known as "the Medicine Faculty from Timisoara", located behind the County Hall, the very same building we are in now.

Four-hundred and twelve students entered the first year, while the second year consisted in seventy-six students from other medical schools in Romania. Opening ceremony was an emotional moment, filled with the flamboyant enthusiasm of both the students and the professors.

Subsequent confessions revealed that all were very much aware of the difficulties awaiting for them, of the barriers inherent to any beginning. But their soul was large, wishing for good and progress, united them and gave them strength to work, even more when the still open wounds of the war were surrounding them. Their wish to heal those wounds was so strong, that all other Universities from Romania offered help and support. In this regard, we must mention that the University of Medicine from Bucharest and Traian Vuia Institute from Timisoara helped the newly-founded medical school with teaching materials and not only. Beginning was difficult, with trembled steps, as it happens to

everybody, but their will and determination eventually overcame all barriers.

Students worked hard, on all plans, they even washed floors and windows. Exceptional professors who had a major contribution were: Serban Bratianu in Histology, Zalman Iagnov - Anatomy, Ilie Georgescu, Benedict Menkes, Ion Mesrobeanu, Mircea Mezincescu, and Ion Muresan - Surgical Pathology. The lecturers of that time, extraordinary professors later, Pius Branzeu in Surgery and Constanta Ramniceanu in Histology, also were among the greatest contributors. These teachers were never forgotten by the students. Other great personalities were then appointed professors: Mihai Vanghelovici in Chemistry, Marin Popescu in Physiology, Gheorghe Lupascu in Parasitology, Ioan Cotaescu and Ion Fagarasanu in Surgical Semiology, Ana Aslan in Internal Medicine. The list of those who opened new roads continues with Henry Aubert and Aurel Păunescu-Podeanu in Internal Medicine, Emil Hurmuzache in Pediatrics, Dumitru Popescu in Obstetrics-Gynecology, Constantin Anastasatu in Pneumology, Vladimir Bușilă in Infectious Diseases, and Dan Berceanu in Orthopedics.

They were followed by personalities whose names are written in the history of Romanian medicine: Ștefan Gârbea, Oscar Sager, Nicolae Zolog, Iosif Bulbuca, N. Margineanu, V. Miclaus, Mircea Ancusa. Of course, along time, new names completed the list and made it truly impressive. All these distinguished professors were founders of a school that we have inherited and spare no effort to continue at the highest levels established by our renown forerunners and to meet the standards set 60 years ago.

From the very beginning, the Timisoara Medical School has earned a well-deserved prestige among specialists from all over the country and we are doing our best to continue this tradition. A proof of this determined endeavor is represented, among other things, the international relationships and agreements that our University has developed with famous international universities. One of the most authentic proof is the presence in this hall of so many well-known medical personalities as well as from other fields. We warmly welcome all those who were distinguished with Doctor Honoris Causa of our University and who, as new colleagues of ours, have kindly considered to join us in this celebration. We have among us Professor Zoran Vucasinovici from Serbia and Professor Gunther Laufer from Austria.

Since its foundation, Medical School from Timisoara was headed by several rectors. Unfortunately time has taken its toll and some of them cannot be

with us today: Professor Gheorghe Lupașcu (1948-1952), Professor Henry Aubert (1952-1956), Professor Ștefan Gârbea (1956-1964), Professor Pius Brânzeu (1964-1976), Professor Ștefan Gavrilescu (1976-1979). In their memory, I propose to take a moment.

Since joy is the most powerful feeling today, we are happy that we have the occasion to thank and express our gratitude to the previous rectors of our University who are here with us, for what they have accomplished for the University and for Timisoara and Romanian medical school. We thank you: Professor Gheorghe Bacanu (1979-1989), Professor Popa Emanoil (1989), Professor Mihai Dragomirescu (1989-1992) and Professor Stefan Dragulescu (1992-2005).

Of course, numerous and various transformations took place in these 60 years. Structural changes are an example: until 1948 we had a Faculty of Medicine, between 1948 and 1990, it was called the Medicine Institute, and afterwards it was transformed into the University of Medicine and Pharmacy; since 2001 the university took the name of great scientist Victor Babes, born in Timisoara. He was a world-wide recognized microbiologist and virologist, and among other extraordinary achievements, he also discovered the virus of rabies.

Other changes have also taken place, not only in the name but in many other regards, often needing a great input of energy and effort, as barriers and difficulties were not few. New faculties were opened. The Faculty of Pediatrics functioned for a period, until a nation-wide decision was taken to make it part of the Faculty of Medicine. In 1964, Stomatology Faculty was founded, currently known as Faculty of Dental Medicine. Faculty training in dental medicine has seen great progress and has developed significantly in the past years, largely due to its latter deans: Professor Emanoil Popa, Professor Robert Nussbaum and Professor Dorin Bratu.

An old dream of ours came true in 1990, when the Faculty of Pharmacy was opened, a young but ambitious faculty. The Faculty of Physical and Kinetic Therapy was founded later on, currently a specialty within the Faculty of Medicine. And the growth of our University doesn't stop here. Starting university year 1993-1994, short-term education was instituted by opening the College for Dental Technicians; it has become part of Faculty of Dental Medicine starting this autumn. Moreover, starting this year, all colleges have been integrated in as specializations within different faculties.

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" is structured in three faculties: Medicine, Pharmacy and Dental Medicine, each of them having

its own specializations.

The Faculty of Medicine has now five specializations: General Medicine (6-year duration), Midwives (4-year duration), General Nursing (3-year duration), Clinical Laboratory (3-year duration), Balneo-Physio-Kinotherapy and Rehabilitation (3-year duration). The Faculty of Dental Medicine has three specializations: Dental Medicine (6-year duration), Dental Nursing (3-year duration), Dental Technicians (3-year duration). The Faculty of Pharmacy with two specializations: Pharmacy (5-year duration) and Pharmacy Nursing (3-year duration).

After 1989, our University enjoyed a wide opening to the world. We have witnessed an information explosion, the possibility to attend international scientific meetings has become a reality, and we have had international exchanges that allow us to raise the quality of University education to the standards of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Currently, there are 4,014 students enrolled at our University. Seven hundred and 14 of them are foreign students, residents and PhD students from 42 countries from four continents. The teaching staff is currently represented by 726 persons, 60% of them are teaching assistants and assistant professors, as this is how the future heads of the clinics and departments are trained.

Regarding the collaboration with international medical schools, we have established so far relationships with: University Aix en Provence II, Marseille, a cooperation agreement with Université Paris VI Pierre et Marie Curie, a trilateral agreement with Szeged University "Albert Szent Györgyi", Novi Sad University and with the Faculty of Medicine from Belgrad.

We have become part of European interuniversity cooperation scientific and research programs, such as Socrate/Erasmus, that includes bilateral agreements with medical schools from France (Marseille, Lille, Nice, Clermont-Ferrand), Germany (Tubingen, Heidelberg), Italy (Rome, Bari, Milano), Belgium (Gent). Other programs we have become part of are: Leonardo, Minerva, Frame Program 6. Belgium offers our University scholarships for residents, summer exchange programs are taking place with Frankfurt and Vienna, and the list doesn't stop here.

Of course, what we now call the Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Timisoara, has walked since its beginnings on a difficult road, with ups and downs, difficulties and achievements, successes and failures. But its most important asset has been the devotion and perseverance of its servants, the teaching staff and the students.

This devotion and the relentless efforts aiming to help others overpass the most serious thing on earth, i.e. the human pain, have left a deep impression on the entire life of those who once worded or will word the sacred Hippocratic Oath: "Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick". These words serve as a guiding light on the road through the unknown mysteries of the human being, whose humble servants are us, the physicians. As a physician, you can be nothing else but a slave, a humble slave attentive to patients' needs, whose health and often life depend on you.

That is why our first command, as members of this institution, as well as the duty of our colleagues, is to respect it and do what is humanly possible to contribute to its continuing development. It is the only way we can feel we have done our duty, a duty we must accomplish regardless the price. Of course, this is not an excessive demand from us, as the man can and has to be always strong. As mother Theresa puts it: "When you cannot run, walk, and when you can't walk anymore, take a walking stick, but never stop!"

It is my strong belief that we all try to keep up a brisk pace, according to our times, but also that we will know when to take a walking stick when the situation will be requiring one, beyond our will, but we will never stop the ascending road to development taken by our University.

I must admit that, compared to the 60-year evolution of the Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Timisoara and to the relentless work of the teaching staff and students' hard work, my present speech is truly poor. But I never aimed it to be but an overview of the numerous events and people in the existence of our University. Maybe some of you think I should have mentioned many other things and you are right.

But, above all, the most important fact is that all these have found a durable place in your mind and heart. Not forgetting our predecessors is the stimulus that sets an example and enables the young generation to continue the tradition, increasing the standards of quality.

Dan V. Poenaru
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