

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT THE NOFER INSTITUTE OF OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY TRAINING OF PHYSICIANS IN OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE

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Abstract. The School of Public Health was opened on 30 June 1992 as an integral part of the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine. The late Director General of the Institute, Professor Janusz A. Indulski (1930–1999) was its initiator and founder.

The School of Public Health is a scientific, research and didactic unit of the Nofer Institute. It offers post-graduate studies in the areas of occupational medicine, work hygiene, public health, environmental health, organization and management of health care and health promotion.

The opportunity for multidisciplinary education of specialists in occupational medicine lies in the fact that the didactic process organized by the School is based on the knowledge, experience and skills of the Institutes' research workers. Lectures are provided by 100 persons, including 22 professors, 6 assistant professors and over 50 doctors. The didactic team also includes outstanding national and international experts (WHO, OECD, IAAE, etc.).

During the last five years, the number of students increased from 1200 in 1996 to over 2200 by the end of 2000.

Key words:

Multidisciplinary training, Occupational physicians

For more than three decades, Polish medical university graduates willing to pursue their professional careers have been exposed to a postgraduate specialization training process consisting of two degrees. This training system split into two parts of a 3-year duration each produced large numbers of 1st and 2nd degree specialists in each medical discipline, fulfilling the national needs for highly qualified medical manpower. However, from the perspective of future accession of Poland to the European Union, it became clear that this system cannot meet the demands of the single-grade European postgraduate medical training framework.

Therefore, since 1996 several legal acts and regulations, introducing a new model of training in Poland, have been formulated and further implemented with the objective to

harmonize the Polish system with the model observed in European Union member states. Among them the following ones are of paramount importance:

- Physician's Profession Act [1],
- Regulation on internship requirements for physicians and dentists [2], and
- Regulation on specialization training for physicians and dentists [3] – both issued by the Ministry of Health.

In general, these documents have created a legal basis for thorough organizational changes, including the most essential one, the replacement of an "old" two-degree system by a single-degree specialization in all main medical disciplines with 4–6 years of training process, depending on the discipline.

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Within this new framework, Occupational Medicine has sustained its status of main medical speciality. The training in this field has been established to last five years, which is in compliance with Article 27 of Directive 93/16/EC [4] stating among others that "... the minimum length of specialization training courses in occupational medicine may not be less than 4 years..."

These legislative changes in the training system, imposed the need for a new training program. In 1998, the School of Public Health at the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine in Łódź, was granted a governmental financial support in order to develop a new research-based specialization training program in occupational medicine for physicians in Poland. The activities undertaken involved a research project aimed at analyzing occupational medicine training programs adopted by some European member states with regard to curricula, methods of training and methods of evaluation.

Following the research phase, the Center for Postgraduate Medical Education in Warsaw designated a group of experts, representing various occupational health institutions and professional bodies, to formulate a new specialization training program in occupational medicine for physicians. The group was headed by the National Consultant in Occupational Medicine also actively involved in the research on the European training programs. After extensive consultations with the Polish Chamber of Physicians and other professional bodies the new specialization training program in occupational medicine for physicians in Poland was finally accepted by the Ministry of Health at the beginning of 2000.

The entry requirements for specialization in occupational medicine are as follows:

- Medical Diploma – Licensed Physician;
- 18 months of General Medical Internship;
- National Board Licensure Examination;
- Competitive Entry Test Examination for candidates for specialization training;
- Candidates' interviews.

The main educational aims of specialization training include:

- Analysis and evaluation of relationship between work environment and health of workers exposed to working conditions and factors hazardous to health;
- Evaluation of the size, type and duration of occupational exposure to chemical, physical, biological and psychosocial health hazards;
- Preventive healthcare services for workers;
- Prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of occupational and other diseases that may be related to work;
- Medical assessment and certification of fitness/disability to work;
- Initiation and surveillance of therapeutic and occupational rehabilitation;
- Design, development and implementation of health promotion programs at workplaces;
- Identification and assessment of health risks from hazards at workplace;
- Collaboration with employers in planning the amount of work, organisation of workplaces and working conditions to ensure optimum standards of work hygiene, physiology and ergonomics;
- Advise on the selection of personal protective equipment (PPE);
- Selection of appropriate biological monitoring methods;
- Advise in decision-making processes concerning health and safety issues at the enterprise;
- Analysis of causes of occupational diseases and accidents at work.

THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The School of Public Health (SPH) was opened on 30 June 1992, as an integral part of the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine (NIOM) in Łódź, Poland. Undertaking that ambitious enterprise, the Institute had already much experience in pre- and postgraduate training gathered since 1958, when occupational medicine gained the status of medical discipline, equal in its rights and duties to such disciplines as internal medicine or cardiology. The new status of occupational medicine has laid the foundations of training sessions and courses for physi-

cians and other specialists in this field. Since 1978, the scientific staff of the NIOM have been elaborating teaching programs in occupational medicine for the Medical Faculty students at the University of Medicine in Łódź.

Significant modifications and revisions of the NIOM scientific and research programs, gradually implemented between 1970 and 1990, together with its close links with the world trends in research and didactic activities (bringing the NIOM to the position of the WHO Collaborating Center, since 1975), have all been very important for the creation of the present character of the SPH. In subsequent years, an extensive research program has been developed, focusing on environmental health hazards but also dealing with such fields as radiological protection, environmental epidemiology, health care organization and management, occupational hygiene, environmental toxicology, occupational psychology and sociology of medicine. At the turn of the 1980's the program was extended to include two other areas –health economics and health promotion. The trends and substance of the research conducted are reflected in the organizational structure of the Institute, revealing its multidisciplinary character and large potential for training of occupational medicine specialists with a scope practically unique in Poland. The level of teaching offered by the Institute, has been enhanced by the programs of close co-operation with a number of scientific centers in Łódź and throughout the country, including medical universities, the University of Łódź, the National Institute of Hygiene, and the Center for Postgraduate Medical Education in Warsaw. Very important have also been good and long-standing relations with the National Sanitary Inspectorate and the National Inspectorates of Labor and Environmental Protection, as well as with the Ministry of Health and other governmental bodies and departments. There has also been a long tradition of close contacts with municipal and regional health authorities in Łódź.

It should be mentioned that great contribution to the foundation and development of the SPH rendered by the late Director General of the Institute, Professor Janusz A. Indulski (1930–1999) who also held the position of the School Headmaster (without any remuneration) for 7

years, shaped its basic program and organizational structure.

From the very beginning of the SPH operation, Professor Indulski attached great importance to the need for the collaboration with schools of public health in the European Union member states and in the USA. Because of his unbelievable efforts and also due to the favorable attitude of the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) Executive Committee, and its President Ulrich Laasar, our School of Public Health became in 1993 a member of this most important association of schools of public health in Europe. Professor Indulski also made every endeavour to establish a similar association in occupational medicine, crowned with establishing in 1993 the Association of Schools of Occupational Medicine with SPH as an active member of its Executive Committee.

In subsequent years, our international contacts have greatly developed. Co-operation agreements have been signed with accredited schools of public health in the USA (University of Albany, New York and University of Iowa). In 1999 our School joined an exclusive network of six European schools of public health, selected by Ecole Nationale de la Santé Publique in Rennes, providing the state-of-the-art in health care management training. During the years 1996–2000, the members of the SPH staff participated in training sessions (2 and 3 weeks) and in practical courses (5 months and one year), provided by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The ASPHER and the European Commission, organized sessions, among others in Prague, Luxemburg, Stockholm and Albany, N.Y. They also actively participated in a number of international scientific conferences, devoted to the education in public health and occupational medicine and methods of introducing continuous quality development (CQD) into the postgraduate training in public health and methods for effective control of its implementation.

In 1993–2000, the SPH staff presented about 60 papers at conferences, organized by the ASPHER, European Association of Schools of Occupational Medicine (EASOM), and European Union of Public Health



Associations (EUPHA), in Bielefeld, London, Utrecht, Prague, Madrid, Aarhus, and other cities.

Under the Strategic Governmental Program (SPR-1) "Health Protection and Safety at Work", the SPH, in co-operation with other NIOM departments, accomplished in 1999 one of its major tasks – the development of teaching programs in occupational medicine and occupational hygiene. In June 2000, these new teaching programs were presented at a national conference, devoted to preventive and environmental medicine, organized by the Medical University in Bydgoszcz; the program of training in occupational hygiene was presented at a national conference, organized by the Polish Society of Hygiene and the Polish Society of Industrial Hygienists. In the same year two guide-books were also published [5,6].

The results of our research, conducted within the task in question, has also been taken into account in the new program of medical specialization in occupational medicine – approved by the Minister of Health in 2000 [7].

The preparation of two manuals in occupational medicine and hygiene addressed to specialists in occupational health care has contributed greatly to the enhancement of the quality of training [8,9].

During the recent years, under the already mentioned Strategic Governmental Program, members of the Institute's staff have published about 50 reports, presenting the latest developments in environmental epidemiology, environmental health risks, toxicology, audiology, occupational hygiene, chemical and physical hazards, radiological protection, physiology and ergonomics of labor, organization of occupational health care, health promotion at workplace, occupational psychology, and the economic effectiveness of health promotion programs at work.

Thus, the School of Public Health has at its disposal, manuals and guide-books for teaching in occupational medicine and hygiene, together with a complete set of didactic materials to provide the participants of our training sessions with the state-of-the-art knowledge, taking into account at the same time the demands of the multidisciplinary approach to training of professionals in occupational health care.

The possibility of multidisciplinary training is provided by the SPH staff, consisting mainly of research workers of the

Institute, as well as by outstanding specialists, WHO, OECD and IAAE experts and national consultants. The SPH employs 100 persons, including 22 professors, 6 assistant professors and more than 50 holders of Ph.D degree. During the last 5 years, the number of our students increased from about 1200 in 1996 to more than 2200 by the end of 2000.

At present, the SPH offers postgraduate courses in the following areas:

- Occupational medicine
- Occupational hygiene
- Environmental health
- Public health
- Health promotion at workplace
- Health care organization, management and economics and from the year 2001:
- Health, environment, and safety management in enterprises

At the turn of 2000, the SPH made a number of research and organizational attempts to implement at the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine the method of distance learning.

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