Laudation on granting the University of Medical Sciences, poznan Polen

Doctor Honoris Causa title

to Professor Alexander Bernhard at 2004

Magnificem Rector, Honourable Members of the Senate, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Doctor Honoris Causa is the highest honorary title that a University can bestow on any individual. It is an expression of acknowledgment and appreciation for outstanding scientific achievement endorsed and acclaimed by our University, Poland and internationally.

Professor Alexander Bernhard has, among his many scientific achievements, 283 publications to his credit. They are either written by himself or in conjunction with others. They are mostly published in English, as are most of internationally recognized scientific journals. He has given a great number of lectures at German and international congresses. He has also presided over numerous scientific programmes.

In his experimental and clinical research, he has been occupied by all the most important issues of paediatric cardiology: the tetralogy of Fallot, the d-transposition of the great arteries and heart transplantation. Attention must be drawn to his pioneering research on the application of allogeneic tissues in the treatment of valve defects (among others the use of the allogeneic mitral valve), as well as stentless xenogenic valves (porcine valve preserved in glutaraldehyde). He has also performed research on the use of hypothermia and deep hypothermia in the treatment of heart defects. The results of this research are a crucial and original contribution of Professor Alexander Bernhard to the world medicine.

Apart from his purely professional activity, Professor Bernhard undertook numerous initiatives with the aim of rendering aid to Polish cardiosurgery through the training of specialists from many Polish paediatric cardiosurgery centres, including Poznań. He provided vital equipment and operated on Polish cardiosurgical patients in Kiel. In the 1990s he acquired financial means for the modernization of the operational theatre of the Paediatric Cardiosurgery Department of the Paediatric Institute of the University of Medical Sciences in Poznań. Another beneficiary was the Intensive Care Unit of the department noted above. Professor Bernhard convinced the German Red Cross and the most prominent members of German politics to finance this programme.

Professor Bernhard included numerous Polish paediatric and adult cardiosurge centres in his activities. In the early 1980s, along with a team of specialists from Kiel he operated on children with heart defects in the The Children’s Memorial Health Institute in Warsaw. In 1989 he took children for treatment from Gdańsk, Poznań and Kraków, and operated on them in Kiel. The children went to Kiel along with the parents and specialists from Polish centres. The accompanying specialists also received practical training. The whole project was financed by means obtained Professor Alexander Bernhard. Apart from the training organized in Kiel, he ma times visited Poland and presented lectures on the latest developments in cardiac surgery.

Between 1969-1997, Professor Alexander Bernhard initiated exchange programmes between the Children’s Memorial Health Institute in Warsaw, the Silesian Center of Cardiology in Zabrze and the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poznań, which resulted in the efficient and effective training of Polish specialists and, consequently dynamic progress in Polish pediatric cardiosurgery.
Exchange programmes between the Kiel University and our University have continued until today. One of the beneficiaries is the Paediatric Cardiosurge Department of the University of Medical Sciences in Poznań, whose entire medical staff received repeated training at the Kiel Department. These visits resulted in scientific co-operation. The co-operation would have been impossible but for the personal involvement of Professor Bernhard and financial means that he gathered from various sources.

Professor Alexander Bernhard is not only a magnificent doctor, scientist and teacher, but also a man with passion, vivid personality and artistic flair. Contacts with him are very stimulating, and this, in addition to persuasive and influential personality enables other to accept his visions and to "move mountains".

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Bernhard for all his efforts in the treatment of Polish children and for the training of specialists. The most important beneficiaries of those efforts are Polish children, for whom treatment is now fully accessible throughout our country and is of the highest quality.

Prof. dr hab. Michał Wojtalik