

IN MEMORIAM

Professor Bogdan Zaharia, MD, PhD (1941–2010)

Bogdan Alexandru Zaharia was born on January 28th, 1941 in Timisoara. He was an exceptional personality, as a professional, as a master and, last but not least, as a MAN.

First and foremost, Professor Bogdan Zaharia proudly ascertained his appearance to the spiritual area of Oltenia to which he very determinately returned twice in life: for the first time in 1954, when he left a famous high school in Bucharest for the high school Charles I (Nicolae Balcescu, at the time) in Craiova and, a second time, and final, in 1972, when he became a member of the academic staff of the Faculty of Medicine of Craiova, after having turned down the offer and chance of working as a researcher at the “Victor Babes” Institute in Bucharest, at the time the leading unit of the Romanian pathology.

His professional dimension was marked by passion, devotion and respect he put into a medical specialization of utmost importance for both the medical practice and medical education – Pathology – which few physicians are brave and inquisitive enough to choose and then to take up as a profession.

He graduated the Faculty of Medicine of Bucharest in 1965 and was trained as pathologist in Professor Emil C. Craciun’s “School” of Pathology. His professional evolution as a pathologist was a model to follow. He passed through all the hierarchical steps, starting since faculty with apprenticeship training stages up to senior pathologist, successfully passing the landmarking examinations due to his medical competence achieved with perseverance and devotion (Externship – 1963, Preclinical Internship – 1964, Internship in Pathology – 1967, Resident in Pathology – 1969, Pathologist – 1972, Senior Pathologist – 1981).

His undeniable professional competence and merits were fully recognized in 1990 when he was appointed Head of the Department of Pathology in the most important hospital of Craiova but also of Oltenia region, the Emergency County Hospital.

His academic evolution was also marked by step-by-step promotions, proving with each step his undoubted professionalism and talent as a master, getting to the highest rank, i.e. professorship. He started his teaching career in 1972 as a professor’s assistant in Pathology in the newly founded Faculty of Medicine of Craiova, then as a senior lecturer, in 1979, Associated Professor in 1997 and finally, Professor in 2006. After Professor I. T. Rosculescu’s retirement, he took over the coordination and development of pathology research and education in Oltenia region as Head of the Departments of Pathology of both Craiova Emergency County Hospital and Faculty of Medicine.

Throughout his whole career as a master, he strove to further the knowledge of the morphological basis of various diseases, in correlation with the physiopathological disturbances underlying clinical manifestations and imposing a certain therapeutical approach. In order to achieve this goal, he restructured the presentation of the morphological fundamentalia that a future medical graduate should know, and was a fervent promoter of new methods and approaches in teaching.

As Head of the Departments of Pathology of both Craiova Emergency County Hospital and Faculty of Medicine, he actively contributed to the setting up of teams of highly trained professionals both in the medical practice and the teaching of Pathology, continuously following the trends in the international Pathology of the time. Thus, in 1999 he initiated the introduction of immunohistochemical techniques in the current protocols of the Laboratory.

An inquisitive spirit himself, he successfully introduced and promoted research as part of the activity of both professional groups he coordinated, which he made work as one large team. This was reflected in the research projects developed, beginning with 1999.

He was a member of a large number of professional organizations of which we quote: the Romanian Society for Normal and Pathological Morphology, the Romanian Division of the International Academy of Pathology and of the European Society of Pathology.

He always attracted and supported young, motivated professionals to participate in the research activity; quite a number of students choosing to work out and finalize their diploma papers in Pathology, under his supervision. A large number of students participated in Students’ Science Classes or were part of the research teams functioning in the Departments of Pathology he managed.

He started to be interested in science and research ever since he was a student in Bucharest, being included in an international research project led by Acad. Prof. Dr. Grigore Benetato, for the study of the morpho-functional response of animals to hypergravity. Doctor Zaharia’s doctoral dissertation was another landmark in his activity as a



researcher. He worked under one of the most famous personalities of the contemporary Romanian Pathology, Professor Florin Hălălău. He defended his dissertation in 1997. In his dissertation, he boldly approached a very exciting theme – *Classification and Histopathology of Soft Tissue Tumors*.

His preferred areas of research included the mesenchyme as a support structure of normal and pathological functional tissues (stroma, tumoral stroma), soft tissues tumors, cancer in general and cancer in children in particular, non-tumoral pathology in children, ageing processes. Mention should be made of his research papers on Wilms' tumour, Meckel's diverticulum, on the behavior of tumoral stroma in certain types of carcinoma or on the age-related morphological changes in the seminal epithelium.

The results of this meticulous and uninterrupted research activity were materialized in over 250 studies, presented at various national and international congresses and symposia, in over 50 papers published in national (*Revista de Morfologie Normală și Patologică*, which became the Romanian Journal of Morphology and Embryology, *Analele Universității* of Craiova later Craiova Medicală, *Revista de Medicină Legală*, *Revue Roumaine de Physiologie*, *Chirurgia*, *Pediatria*, *Oftalmologia*, *Dermatovenerologia*, *Jurnalul Societății Române de Anestezie și Terapie Intensivă*, *Stomatologia*) and international (*Revue de Medicine Aeronautique et Spatiale* or *Aviation Space and Environmental Medicine*) specialized journals and five monographs and books.

All his life, Professor Bogdan Zaharia was one of the most active personalities of the medical school and the medical life of Craiova and, very impressively, always surrounded by young, enthusiastic spirits. I am sure that both his theoretical and practical courses in the IIIrd year of medical school will forever remain in the minds and hearts of his students. I am also sure that quite a number of his former students will always nostalgically remember the moments of relaxation and good time they spent with their master in the rehearsal breaks of the Craiova Medical School Choir.

If we wanted to set up a scale of true professionalism, Professor Bogdan Zaharia, a vivid and visionary spirit, almost obsessively preoccupied with self-education and perfecting, should be considered beyond any doubt a true standard unit. If we also intended to show what a real intellectual means, evoking the personality of our master should be again one of the most appropriate models because his exceptional professionalism was doubled and strengthened by an impressive erudition.

Professor Bogdan Zaharia's exceptional personality was further enriched by immeasurable generosity and dedication. He used to give all the time, deliberately and unconditionally, his total support, both professionally and, probably most important, in private life to all who were lucky enough to be around him.

Open-hearted, straightforward, trenchant but ironic, often acid, sometimes outbursting but always structurally incapable of doing any harm, Professor Bogdan Zaharia tried to shape the personalities of those around him, with delicacy and also tenacity, wishing to transfer the features he thought should define a human being: true professionalism, verticality, a highly moral stand but also a good sense of humor. Irony, the armor he protected with a structurally timid and sensitive self, was in the same time, the weapon he used against barren characters, impostors and fake professionals.

More than anything else, Professor Bogdan Zaharia gave everything with unrestricted, altruistic and unconditioned love. He was devoted to his profession, first and foremost, and to the institutions he worked in most of his career: the University of Medicine and Pharmacy and the Emergency Clinical Hospital of Craiova.

He surrounded with a protecting love his students, generation after generation, and the colleagues from the Departments of Pathology he managed and guided since 1990 almost to his official retirement. He also loved and respected all the academics and medical staff of the two institutions.

However, the corollary of a dedicated life to the medical profession, sometimes to self-sacrifice, was the patient, perseverant, discrete but highly selective "construction" and then consecration of what Professor Bogdan Zaharia used to call, with his well known modesty, "The family of oltenian pathologists", and which, we, his disciples, dare to call "The Oltenian School of Pathology", undeniably recognized by both the national and international medical communities.

If we were to draw a map of the pathology centers in which pathologists who were students of, got their degrees or worked under Professor Bogdan Zaharia's guidance, we should start with the nucleus represented by the teams from the Departments of Pathology of Craiova Emergency County Hospital and Faculty of Medicine, which is also the coordinating center of this School, and move to other medical units from Craiova (Railway University Hospital, Forensic Institute and Armed Forces Hospital), then the Departments of Pathology of other county or city hospitals of Oltenia (Târgu-Jiu, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Slatina, Caracal, Târgu-Cărbunești and Calafăt), or beyond its frontiers (Târgoviște, Alexandria, Bârlad, Buzău, Tulcea) or certain hospitals in Bucharest (St. John and "Bucur" Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital) and Cluj-Napoca. A few pathologists trained in this "School" currently work in Canada and the USA.

He who forgets or does not respect his roots is condemned to non-existence and Professor Bogdan Zaharia is one of the deepest roots through which The Medical School of Craiova was strongly anchored and imposed itself in Romanian medical academic community as an important pivot.

We should never forget this, if we claim we are this great Master's devoted apprentices!