Tomas Pexieder 1941–1995: a tribute to a pioneer of modern cardiac embryology

On 28 October 1995, while climbing in the Swiss Alps, Tomas Pexieder died tragically. This terrible event deeply moved the Working Group of Developmental Anatomy and Pathology of the European Society of Cardiology, since Tomas was the founder and first Co-Chairman of the Working Group, formerly named 'Embryology and Teratology' (1982–1986) (Fig. 1), and attended most of the recent ESC Congresses, organizing symposia and 'how-to' sessions and presenting lectures on both normal and embryology and the aetiology of congenital heart disease.

Tomas was born in Prague on 6 June 1941 to a family distinguished in the arts, sciences and politics of Democratic Czechoslovakia. In the Communist system at that time, this family background proved to be a drawback and he was refused admission to the University of Prague three times. Eventually he succeeded and then attended the Faculty of Medicine, Charles University, Prague, achieving the MD Diploma in 1965.

He studied as a research fellow in the laboratory of Dr Zdeneck Rychter, an eminent embryologist who was investigating the dynamics of cardiovascular development. In 1968, at the time of the Prague Spring, Tomas was in Sweden having obtained a grant from the Svenska Institute in Stockholm, Institute of Embryology, Lund. On hearing of the Soviet invasion of his country, he immediately returned to Prague, organized his departure from Czechoslovakia and sought refuge in Switzerland, where at the Institute d'Histologie et d'Embryologie, Université de Lausanne, he spent his career.

On completion of his postgraduate education, he became Lecturer (1971–73), then Assistant Professor (1973–74), and finally Associate Professor (1974–94). In 1995 he was nominated Chairman of the Institute.

He was devoted to teaching and research and served as adviser to 16 doctoral and postdoctoral students, obtained 13 research grants, carried out many professional and administrative responsibilities, and won many awards. In 1976 in Amsterdam at the 7th Congress of the European Society of Cardiology, he won the Young Investigator Award. Overall, he delivered 83 invited lectures, in Europe and overseas, and was member of 13 Academic or Scientific Societies.

He avoided discussing the political situation in Czechoslovakia and his painful decision to leave it. However, after the fall of the Berlin wall, he returned home several times and was reunited with his family and friends.

Tomas will be remembered as a great cardiac embryologist. He was the first to apply scanning electron microscopy to the three-dimensional study of the embryo. His contributions on the role of programmed cell death in embryo development and as a response to environmental factors anticipated by more than 20 years the fascinating topic of apoptosis. He recognized the confusing terminology of embryogenic cardiac structures and made major contributions in nomenclature and taxonomy, especially when he was Chairman of the Working Group 'Embryology and Teratology'.

He strongly believed in the quantitative analysis of animal models of congenital heart disease as a key to understanding the mechanism of cardiac maldevelopment. He studied the conotruncal defects in the keeshond dog, cardiac phenotypes in the trisomic mouse and the use of retinoic acid to produce a model of transposition of great arteries in mice.

He was also interested in epidemiology, and was responsible for the project EUROCAT on the epidemiology of congenital heart disease in Europe[1]. Recently, he turned to molecular and cellular biology and started a joint research project on transgenic animal models to reproduce cardiac structural defects.

Tomas was an extremely keen scholar. We will remember his shy but affable character, and especially his generosity. He was very strict and demanding. As outlined by Ed Clark in his Pexieder's obituary, published in *Cardiology in the Young*, 'Tomas sought truth and accuracy and was intolerant of haphazard and mediocre science ... in the spirit of inquiry, never with a sense of malice'[2].

I wish to finish this brief commemoration of Tomas Pexieder by quoting his words, namely the final remarks in one of his last papers, which seems like a 'scientific will' to our Working Group:
'From a small group of individuals representing the core of what had been done in cardiac embryology and teratology in 1978, the family has grown to almost 200 scientists around the world. They are

Figure 1 **(a) The Working Group 'Developmental Anatomy and Pathology' at the Meeting held in Gottingen, September 1986. (b) Close-up: the Chairman Tomas Pexieder.**

patiently completing, piece by piece, the puzzle of cardiac morphogenesis and teratogenesis. The last couple of years has brought in a qualitative change with the advent of molecular biology and molecular genetics concepts and technologies. A close collaboration of molecular biologists with scientists interested in clinical, functional, and morphological aspects of normal and/or malformed hearts will certainly advance our understanding, therapeutical implications, and even perhaps possibilities of primary prevention'[3].

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References

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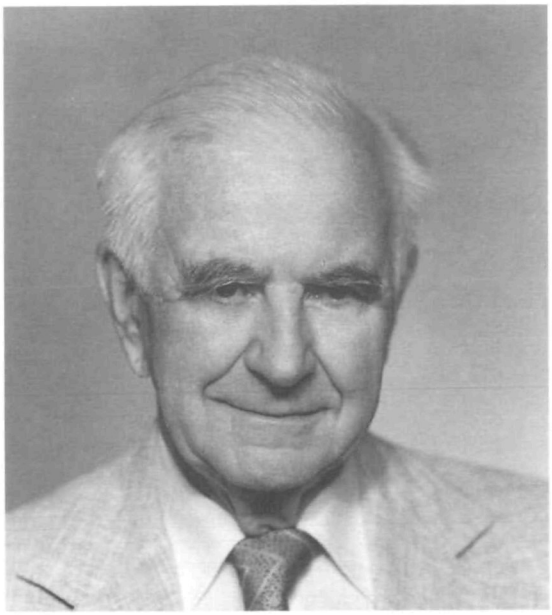
Professor Pavel Lukl 1905–1995



Pavel Lukl was President of the European Society of Cardiology from 1966 to 1970. The Society was sad to learn of his death on December 4th 1995 at the age of 90 years.

Pavel Lukl was born in 1905 to a family of well known gynaecologists and obstetricians in Prague. He was brought up in a strictly protestant environment with the emphasis in the family being placed on education and languages. He graduated from the Charles University in Prague in 1930, going on to undertake his early clinical training there and being appointed as an Associate Professor to the First Medical Department. In 1945 after the end of the war he was appointed Head of the Department of Internal Medicine in the newly established Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Hradec Kralove. In 1947 after a visit by an American delegation, Professor Paul Dudley White chose Professor Lukl to be awarded a scholarship enabling him to study in the United States. He brought back many new ideas which were implemented in his hospital. In 1953 the Faculty of Medicine was converted into a military medical academy and Professor Lukl transferred to Palacky University in Olomouc. In 1970 after the Russian invasion there were major political changes in the country and Professor Lukl was forced to leave the University and the Board of the Czechoslovakian Cardiological Society of which he had been President for 12 years. He was not allowed to publish but continued to teach and maintained a small medical practice. After the political changes in 1989 the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Olomouc invited him back to the University to be involved in medical education.

Professor Lukl was one of the founders of the Czechoslovakian Cardiological Society in 1929. He was the President from 1959–1971. In 1964 he organised the Congress of the European Society of Cardiology in Prague. He was elected Vice-President in 1964 and became President of the European Society of Cardiology in 1966. His work was recognised internationally and he was awarded honours by the French, Italian, Spanish, British, and Polish Cardiac Societies. He was an honorary member of the American College of Physicians. He published extensively including monographs and a text book on cardiology. He was a pioneer in advancing the examination of the cardiovascular system and was responsible for introducing cardiac catheterization in his country.

His interests extended outside medicine. Professor Lukl devoted much thought to consideration of issues relating to education and ethics. He had a keen interest in music. Professor Lukl came from a long lived family and is survived by four children, two of whom are pursuing a career in medicine.

His contribution to cardiology, the European Society of Cardiology and humanity will not be forgotten.

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