

ACADEMICIAN EUGEN TOPOLNIK

On the occasion of his 100th birthday

Slavko Cvetnić

Our meeting at the beginning of November 2011 marked thirty years since professor Eugene Topolnik has been retired. In just two months he will celebrate his 100th birthday. Since he retired (1981) we have met regularly. At first this was every week at the Veterinary Faculty and later at the Academy. For several years he has been unable to leave his home, so we now visit him at home. In our conversations he remains the teacher and I am his pupil. He does most of the talking and I listen. In this way I have learned a great deal about his life. He was born on 9th January 1912 in Tuzla, into a teacher's family where seven children were born and grew up. For many years now he has been the only one of them left. After several years his family moved to Zagreb. Here he attended elementary school and classical high school (graduating in 1930) and studied at the Veterinary Faculty (graduating in 1935). In his later years in high school and at university he was a gymnast, he loved chess (he attained an appropriate category), and he walked through Gorski Kotar and along the coast from Rijeka (Sušak) to Šibenik. After completing his military service in 1939 he volunteered at the Institute for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases of the Veterinary Faculty in Zagreb. He completed his PhD the following year. He worked as a vet in Kosjerić (Serbia), Trebinje, Perušić and Vrboško. The Second World War found him in the army in Pljevlja (Montenegro). He worked as an assistant at the institute already mentioned from 1941 to 1944, and then went to Moslavina, to the area held by the Partisans. After the war he worked in Serum Institutes in Vrbovec, Kalinovica and Novi Sad. He was appointed assistant at the Veterinary Faculty in 1947. He continued his studies in virology from 1949-1959, spent 12 months in Switzerland and in 1951 became docent of Microbiology and Immunology at the Veterinary Faculty in Zagreb. There he became an associate professor in 1954 and a full professor in 1959. From 1954 to 1977 he was head of the Institute for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. At the same time he held the position of director of the

Corresponding author: Slavko Cvetnić
e-mail: cvetnics@hazu.hr



Academician Eugen Topolnik

Institute for Infectious and Invasive Diseases of the Veterinary Faculty in Zagreb, from 1959 to 1965. Between 1956 and 1979 he was Dean or Vice-dean of the Faculty for several terms. He was a member of the University Board and University Council in Zagreb. For several years he was vice-president of the Society of University Teachers. He was editor of the scientific journal *Veterinary Archives* from 1953-1975. He edited three editions of the *Veterinary Handbook* and several editions by the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences (JAZU), of which he was a regular member from 1979. Alongside all his teaching and administrative duties he found time to go out into the countryside, where he enjoyed the landscape, immortalizing it in water-colour. Some of his paintings have been displayed at public exhibitions.

After he was the first in this country to describe in a dissertation the importance and spread of tuberculosis in poultry, the main direction of his scientific interest became research into viral diseases in animals. He was the first in this part of Europe

to demonstrate Newcastle disease, to study a viral abortion in mares and its clinical similarity to influenza in horses, equine infectious anaemia and viral stomatitis in cattle. He described necrobacillosis, psittacosis, a skin disease in goats similar to heartwater, and so called "water disease" in carp. He researched mucolytic activity in various forms of microorganisms, demonstrating the enzyme hyaluronidase in some and its role in pathogenesis. With colleagues he researched respiratory diseases in beef cattle and showed the role of individual viruses in their etiopathogenesis. These findings were used later for prophylaxis of respiratory infections in cattle. Further, he studied the pathogenicity of certain yeasts, the possibility of treating some diseases with bacteriophages, the diagnostics and treatment of dysentery in lambs, the diagnostics of various strains of salmonella, Q fever in Croatia in animals and humans, the action of some amino acids on multiplication of viruses and dystrophy of the liver in horses. He published all the results of his research in 78 scientific papers in national and foreign scientific journals.

Eugen Topolnik, as the dean for many years of the Faculty and as head of the Institute for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, encouraged the foundation and organization of scientific units. We will mention the most important of these: the Centre for Poultry, the Virological Laboratory and the Mycology Laboratory. In the Veterinary Institute in Zagreb he introduced and supervised many diagnostic virology methods. In teaching microbiology he acquainted students with contemporary achievements in the field of microbiology and especially virology. In his scholarly papers, about 59 of them, as well as other things, he dealt with the problems of teaching and organization of the Veterinary Faculty and the Veterinary Institute. His work was printed in the American journal, *Advances in Veterinary Medicine*.

His teaching work included lecturing for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in microbiology and immunology. In this area, together with his colleagues, he wrote several textbooks, notes and handbooks. At his lectures, he passed on to students the latest insights in infectology and the possibilities of applying them in practice. He was a productive mentor for those writing dissertations. He saw as many as 44 veterinarians graduate as doctors of science. Most of them became heads of scientific and professional organizations. He has received many awards for his many years of work.

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