

## IN MEMORIAM

## Professor Nenad Čerlek, MD, PhD (1923-2009)

In 2009, our University Department of Surgery and Sestre milosrdnice University Hospital suffered another loss with Professor Nenad Čerlek passing away. We lost our dear colleague, surgeon, teacher and true gentleman that had come to the Hospital sixty years ago, having worked at our Department for forty years, until his retirement in 1989.

Nenad Čerlek was born in Zagreb on February 19, 1923. In Zagreb, he completed classic high school in 1941 and graduated from the Zagreb School of Medicine in 1947. He worked at Virovitica General Hospital in 1948-1949, and then he moved to our Hospital for residency in general surgery. At the time, Department of Surgery was headed by Dr. Anton Gottlieb, a renowned Zagreb surgeon. Dr. Čerlek worked at Traumatology Hospital in 1952-1953, and then he returned to our Hospital and passed his specialist exam in 1956. Department of Surgery was headed by Professor Danko Riesner, who commented Dr. Čerlek's application for fulltime work as follows: "While working in the operating room, I perceived Dr. Čerlek as a very gifted person, which manifested not only in his manual skillfulness showing considerable improvement but also in excellent solutions proposed in difficult situations encountered in operative procedures. His calmness and reasoning on establishing operative indications is very good indeed. His help was highly valuable in the organization of all tasks entrusted to him during the hard period of our department restructuring, where he invested all his good will, hard work and talent".



As a surgeon, Dr. Čerlek first worked at traumatology department, then at thoracic department, and finally at department of abdominal surgery that became his specialty. In this period, Dr. Čerlek was the first in former Yugoslavia to use endoscopic methods (gastros-copy and laparoscopy) in surgery; the more so, while serving his residency, he was the first to use endotracheal anesthesia. In 1961, he was appointed head of the Department of Abdominal Surgery, while permanently

working part-time at Zagreb School of Medicine with undergraduate students and with residents in the field of gastroenterology. During the 1963-1968 period, he was engaged in experimental research, with operative techniques on the liver in dogs. The experience thus acquired he partially applied in human medicine. In 1967, Dr. Čerlek was awarded the title of Head Doctor. He habilitated at Zagreb School of Dental Medicine in 1974, and earned PhD in 1978, having defended his doctoral dissertation entitled "Regeneration of diseased and healthy liver upon left lobe resection". From 1982 until retirement in 1989, he was Associate Professor at Zagreb School of Dental Medicine. Professor Čerlek published a number of papers in Croatian and international journals, and took active part in numerous congresses and symposia in Croatia and abroad.

As a professional and teacher to generations of young surgeons, Professor Nenad Čerlek left a profound imprint on the development of our University Department of Surgery. He always invested all his

great knowledge and skills in the treatment of patients, transferred his valuable experience self-denyingly to his disciples, and contributed greatly to the profession upgrading, thus being highly respected by his colleagues and disciples.

The seemingly strict appearance and attitude masked Professor Čerlek's profound human feature predominated by his wish to offer help of any kind, and that is why all those having previously knocked on the closed door approached him and believed him. Professor Čerlek's door was always open for them. On the other hand, he appreciated work and discipline above all, which could always be seen in operating room as well as in the management of University Department and its departments. He insisted on the strict and exact performance of the tasks and duties entrusted, accepting no excuse for possible failures even to his close coworkers. I remember many events from our professional life and friendly encounters during some ten years he dedicated to my education, which he per-

formed very systematically and with great patience.

The day of his retirement was impressive indeed. That morning, just like years before, we had our coffee in silence, we shook hands, then he made a round of the operative tract for the last time, said goodbye to his scrub nurses, and he never came back to the Department again. He spent his last years at home, with his wife, broken down by disease, and he did not go out at all.

Professor Čerlek was our master surgeon, to illustrate it by the words said by Dr. E.K. Frey, a renowned German surgeon: "A true master is the one who is not just skilful in techniques, but who is able to enrich the profession with many a new idea and constructive research. The idea of master professional implies a creative personality, in line with the old craftsmen's proverb: Who can be a craftsman? The one having invented something."

*Mario Ledinsky*