

LANGUAGE AND MEDICINE IN THE ZAMENHOF FAMILY

JEZIK I MEDICINA U OBITELJI ZAMENHOF

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SUMMARY

The Zamenhof family is famous for Dr Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof (1859-1917), who created the artificial language Esperanto and who initiated a social movement for peace and against any sort of discrimination. Ludwik was an ophthalmologist. Adam, Leon, Alexander, and Julian Zamenhof were medical doctors and noted surgeons, while Sophia Zamenhof was a paediatrician. Ludwik Zamenhof often referred to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, in which diversity of languages was the punishment for builders who were arrogant and uncaring. With the help of Esperanto, the Zamenhofs metaphorically wanted to overcome the curse of Babel and restore the sense of human unity.

Key words: *Medicine, Esperanto, Zamenhofs*

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Dr Ludwik Zamenhof (1859-1917), sometimes known as Louis Levi Zamenhof or Lejzer Levi Zamenhof, was the inventor of the artificial language Esperanto. He was born 150 years ago in Bialystok, Poland, occupied by Russia at the time. Back then, Bialystok was an industrial centre with notable national and cultural diversity. Communication skills in this milieu were highly valued, since language barriers increased the risk of persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. Ludwik began medical studies in Moscow in 1879 and continued in Warsaw, graduating in 1885. All this time, he pursued his linguistic interests and a strong belief in social justice. In 1887, Ludwik Zamenhof published *Lingvo Internacia* (*International Language*), the first book in Esperanto. Followed *Dua Libro* (*The Second Book*) in 1888 and Esperanto dictionary, *Universala Vortaro* in 1894 [1,2].

For nearly half of his adult life, Ludwik Zamenhof ran an ophthalmology practice to earn a living. He had four sisters: Sara (1860-1870), Fania (1862-ca. 1930), Augusta (1864-ca. 1934), and Ida (1879-1942) and four brothers: Feliks (1868-1933), a pharmacist, Henryk (1871-1932), a dermatologist, Leon (1875-1934), an otolaryngologist, and Aleksander (1877-1916), a general surgeon. Moreover, two of Ludwik's three children, Adam and Sophia, were medical doctors [3].

Esperanto was practiced by distinguished intellectuals like the American psychologist William James, German philologist Max Müller, and Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.¹

In parallel with Esperanto, Ludwik Zamenhof developed “homaranismo” (humanism), a secular ethic that promotes international friendship, brotherhood of the mankind, and peace. Social activism, however, did not detract the Zamenhofs from pursuing other interests and obligations. Initially, Esperanto was promoted in large part through translations of classical works of literature such as *Winter Evening* by Pushkin, *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, and works by Hans Christian Andersen, Dickens, Goethe, Gogol, Heine, and Moliere. Particular credit for numerous translations into Esperanto goes to Ludwik Zamenhof's brother, laryngologist Leon Zamenhof (1875-1934), who also wrote poetry in Esperanto.

Zamenhof's children Adam (1888-1940) and Sophia (1889-1942) studied medicine in Lausanne, Switzerland, while Lidia (1904-1942) trained as a linguist. Sophia specialised in internal medicine and paediatrics [4]. Adam married an ophthalmologist, Wanda Frenkiel (Frenkel) (1893-1954), and in 1925 they had a son Ludwik. Adam was noted for describing various surgical procedures for retinal detachment in Polish

medical journals. His particular field of interest was examination of the ocular fundus using direct and indirect illumination. He also introduced ophthalmologic diagnostic and surgical equipment of his own design. Working with his wife, he became chief of ophthalmology at the Jewish Hospital at Czyste in Warsaw [5]. In 1938, Adam Zamenhof took a post-doctoral degree (Polish *habilitation*) and taught as associate professor.

Aleksander Zamenhof (1877-1916), Ludwik's brother, who used the pseudonym AZO in his Esperanto publications, was born in Warsaw and completed medical studies at Warsaw University in 1902 [6]. He worked in the surgical ward of Saint Spirit Hospital in Warsaw and served as an officer in the Czar's imperial army during the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905). He performed surgery and treated wounded soldiers in Port Arthur, the main military Russian port (Lushun, China). He reported scurvy and other vitamin deficiency diseases in his patient population. After returning to Warsaw and following a fellowship in urology, he became a highly regarded urologist of the Czyste Hospital, and was appointed court physician of the Thai King Rama VI (1881-1925, crowned in 1910), who founded the Chulalongkorn Hospital in 1911 and Vajira Hospital in Thailand in 1912. However, on his way to Siam to perform medical services for the Thai monarch, he was called back to the Czar's army at the outbreak of World War 1. He died of a ruptured cardiac aneurysm in 1916 while still in service as Russian regimental physician in Dinaburg (now Latvia) [6].

One member of the Zamenhof family who survived World War 1 was Julian Zamenhof, born in Warsaw in 1902 [4]. He was the son of a pharmacist Feliks Fabian Zamenhof (Bialystok, 1868 - Warsaw, 1933), Ludwik Zamenhof's brother. Julian graduated in medicine from Warsaw University in 1928 and joined the Bialystok-Warsaw Medical Chamber in 1929. At first he worked in the internal medicine ward of the Infant Jesus Hospital, but later specialised in surgery. In 1935, Julian published an article with Aleksander Wertheim, Czyste Hospital chief surgery, on Osgood-Schlatter disease in the *Polish Surgical Review*. In 1936, he took a position in the Warsaw Municipal Hospital [4]. Julian and his two sisters, Maria and Romana Zamenhof (the latter with a PhD in chemistry), managed to escape from Poland during the German occupation. After the war, the sisters settled in Paris and Morocco. Julian in turn, took refuge in a small English town called Swindon, where regardless of his training in surgery, he had worked as a general practitioner for the rest of his life, serving primarily the Polish refugee population. Although a competent Esperantist,



Dr Julian Zamenhof with his son Robert.

Dr. Julian Zamenhof sa sinom Robertom

Julian was less interested in Esperanto than the rest of his family. Nevertheless, in the best tradition of the Zamenhof family, he kept encouraging and promoting pacifist and democratic ideas. Like Adam [5], Julian was a cellist, and now his son Robert, a medical physics professor in Massachusetts, US, and his grandson Alexander, who is 19, carry on with the tradition.

Julian spent some time with Anna Freud in London learning how to use his gift of hypnosis for psychiatric applications. Returning to Swindon, he had tremendous success in curing adults and children from compulsive behaviours such as nail biting and phobias. He died in Swindon in 1961.

Being a good physician requires good communication with patients. The Zamenhofs, largely a family of linguists and medical doctors, knew very well that successful diagnosis and treatment depended on good communication and understanding with patients.

On more global grounds, the Zamenhofs strived to unite people of the world into a peaceful community through a neutral language and secular ethics.

Dr Esperanto's grand-grand daughter, Maryse Wanda Zaleski-Zamenhof, has continued the tradition; she is a physician and her beloved hobby is learning languages and writing poetry. She earnestly believes that through communication people can overcome their conflicts. Her 18-year-old son Pierre Lebard Zamenhof plans to follow in the family footsteps and study medicine. His hobby are languages (again!), Japanese in particular, and music; he plays the piano and the guitar, and has ventured into composing. For him, music is yet another international language.

All in all, for the physicians in this family medicine is designed to help people, and there is no real health and wellbeing without peace of mind, which stems from quality communication and the world peace.

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SAŽETAK

Obitelj Zamenhof znana je po dr. Ludwiku Zamenhof Lejzeru (1859.–1917), tvorcu umjetnog jezika esperanta i pokretaču socijalnog pokreta za mir i protiv svih oblika diskriminacije. Uz Ludwika koji je bio oftalmolog, od Zamenhofovih doktora medicine i poznati kuruzi bili su Adam, Leon, Aleksandar i Julian, dok je Sofija bila pedijatarica. Ideju o novom zajedničkom jeziku Ludwik Zamenhof pronašao je u legendi iz Biblije o graditeljima babilonske kule koji su zbog oholosti i objesti bili kažnjeni tako da su im promijenjeni i pomiješani jezici te se više nisu mogli sporazumijevati. Uz pomoć esperanta, Zamenhof je, dakle, metaforički želio prevladati babilonsko prokletstvo i vratiti osjećaj ljudskog zajedništva.

Ključne riječi: medicina, esperanto, obitelj Zamenhof

Acknowledgement

Andrzej Wincewicz would like to thank the Foundation for Polish Science for awarding him a START scholarship.