

Abstract

Empirically or Rationalistically? The Dilemma and Practice of University Medicine in Vilnius, 1781-1842

The monograph entitled “Empirically or Rationalistically? The Dilemma and Practice of University Medicine in Vilnius, 1781-1842” was prepared within the programme of the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education entitled “National Programme for Development of Humanities” in 2012-2015 as the result of research project “Natural history and medicine in the region of Vilnius in the Partition period as a part of the Polish national heritage”.

This study focuses on the development of university medicine in Vilnius in 1781-1842 and is based on the results of archival research and literary investigations carried out in Vilnius, Cracow, Poznań and Warsaw. The following problems are analysed in the book: how the practical teaching of medicine was realized; how managers of the clinics of practical medicine (the so-called therapeutic clinic), surgery, and maternity shaped diagnostics and therapy; what innovations were introduced into clinical research and organizational activities; and what ethical obligations for doctors were established at that time. The book consists of an introduction, six chapters, conclusions, bibliography, name index and six annexes. It also includes a list of more important abbreviations, several illustrations and tables.

The first chapter is introductory and presents an outline of the history of university clinics in Vilnius in 1781-1842. The reception of new European philosophical doctrines, empiricism and rationalism, is discussed in the second chapter. Moreover, philosophical-medical views of eminent Vilnius professors

of medicine (August Becu, Jan O'Connor, Ferdinand Spitznagel, Joseph Frank, Jędrzej Śniadecki, and Felix Rymkiewicz) are also presented.

The third chapter is devoted to the development of diagnostics and therapy in the practical medicine clinic in Vilnius. The methods of instrumental and laboratory diagnostics used by clinicians, the paradigms of fever, plica and inflammation, as well as poisons and narcotics used in therapy, and pharmacological experiments are described. Joseph Frank's clinical procedures are compared with Jędrzej Śniadecki's ones.

The development of university surgery in nineteenth-century Vilnius is explored in the fourth chapter. Special attention is drawn to the scientific, clinical and organizational merits of surgeons: Nicolas Regnier, Andrzej Matuszewicz, Jan Fryderyk Niszkowski, Wacław Pelikan, Seweryn Gałęzowski, Konstanty Porcyanko and Józef Korzeniewski. Their lectures and the course of some surgical procedures done without anaesthesia and antiseptics (hernia, amputation of limbs, removal of tumours, laparotomy) are documented.

The fifth chapter is about the development of the maternity clinic and its managers: Nicolas Regnier, Andrzej Matuszewicz and Mikołaj Mianowski. Lectures on obstetrics by Mianowski are investigated to recognize elements of perinatology and neonatology. His clinical research, attitudes to childbirth and patients are described as well.

The last chapter focuses on the innovations introduced into teaching and clinical practice in Vilnius: visualization of the human body, meteorological-statistical research, registers of patients, meta-analysis of scientific data, teaching on medical ethical obligations, including a duty to treat poor people. The Conclusions demonstrate the weak (uncritical acceptance of medical paradigms) and strong points (knowledge of newest medical theories and philosophical doctrines from the West) of clinical medicine in Vilnius in the first decades of the 19th century.

The first annex contains a list of medical histories from the clinic of practical medicine run by Wincenty Herberski and Jędrzej Śniadecki, which are kept in the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Poznań. The second and third annexes are the Polish translations and the Latin original of a doctoral dissertation on encephaloid (a kind of malignant tumour) by Tomasz Porcyanko, which was published in 1812 in Vilnius. The next two annexes contain the Polish translation and the Latin original of a doctoral dissertation on the inflammation of the liver by Franciszek Zabiełło which was published in 1823 in Vilnius. The last annex is the oath formula for physicians from 1825.