



Obituary

In memoriam: Professor Irena Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz (1917–2015)



Professor Irena Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz, one of the most distinguished Polish neurologists, a leader in the field of neuromuscular diseases and electromyography whose contribution was well recognized in international neurological society, passed away on July 7th, 2015.

Professor Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was known not only as a neurologist, but across the whole medical society. The main strength of her creative understanding of science was the ability to incorporate the achievements of basic sciences, mainly biology, into clinical medicine. Her scientific interest included other disciplines and she collaborated with specialists in various scientific fields to realize her comprehensive approach to integrate the clinical observations with electrodiagnostics, morphology, and genetics.

The main research interest of Professor Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was the correlation between the structural deficiency and the function in motor unit disorders in neuromuscular diseases, the role of delayed maturation of muscle and nerves in neuromuscular disorders, primarily in spinal muscular atrophy. In particular, her research showed the links between genotype and phenotype in spinal muscular atrophy in childhood and adolescence. More recently, her scientific interests turned to the spectrum of laminopathies, particularly their genetics, variability and phenotype-genotype correlations.

The results of her research contributed to our understanding of the etiopathogenesis of several muscle and peripheral nervous system diseases, especially spinal muscular atrophy, myasthenia

gravis, and nucleopathy. Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was the author or coauthor of 436 papers and 43 monographs and book chapters. The value of her scientific achievements is seen in the number of citations of her papers which exceeds three thousand.

Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was born in Warsaw on 27 December 1917, graduated from high school in 1935 and started her study at the Medical Faculty University in Warsaw while simultaneously studying psychology. The outbreak of the World War II forced her to interrupt her studies at the Academy. During the war she moved to Lvov to continue her medical studies, got her diploma in 1941 and then moved to Kyrgyzstan and served in the Polish Army as a medical doctor in a field hospital.

After the end of the World War II, Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz returned to Poland. She confirmed her diploma at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 1945 and started her practice in the Department of Neurology at the Medical Academy of Warsaw. In 1945–48 she held the position of a fellow (training in neurology), assistant (1948–1951), assistant professor 1951–1953), associate professor (1954–1958) and since 1974 of a full professor. For thirty years, from 1958 to 1988, she served as the chairman of the Department of Neurology of the Medical Academy of Warsaw. Since 1989 she worked as the Head of Neuromuscular Unit, Medical Research Centre of the Polish Academy of Science that she set up in 1987.

Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz continued developing her interests in clinical neurophysiology by training in EMG; initially, with Prof. François Isch in Strasbourg in 1958 and with Prof. Fritz Buchthal in Copenhagen in 1959. She has developed the first EMG laboratory in Poland. During her years at the Medical Academy of Warsaw (1948–1988), she offered academic courses in graduate and postgraduate training in neurology and EMG. She was invited as lecturer to the Baylor College (Houston), Medical School of Groningen (Holland), Medical School of Tucson (Arizona), to Israel, Turkey, Russia, Japan, and many other places. Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was the member of several scientific societies: Polish Neurological Society (1974–84 – president, since 1990 – honorary president), Polish Society of EEG and Clinical Neurophysiology, Polish Society of Pediatric Neurology (honorary), Polish Society of Neurosciences, Association Against Muscle Diseases.

Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was well known in the international society of neurologists and neurophysiologists, as a member of international organizations such as World Federation Neurology (vice president 1974–78), European Federation of Neurological Societies, World Muscle Society. She was a honorary member of American Neurological Association, French Neurological Society, Italian Neurological Society, Bulgarian Neurological Society, Czech Neurological Society, European Neurological Society, German Pediatric Society, American Association of Electrodiagnostic, Medical Academy Gaetano Conte. She was awarded: Hans Berger Medal

1973, Erb-Duchenne Award 1985, Gaetano Conte Academy Golden Medal 1997, World Federation Award in neuromuscular disorders (2002) and was granted an honorary doctorate at the Strasbourg University (1986).

She was the member of editorial or advisory boards of the Polish Neurology and Neurosurgery, Journal Neurological Science, EMG a Clinical Neurophysiology, Acta Cardiologica, Current Neurology and Neuroscience, Journal of Neurology, Muscle & Nerve, Neuromuscular Disorders.

Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was an amazing and charming person endowed with an unusual personality. She was a very hard working person, and even later in her life she started every day of work early in the morning and worked till late afternoon. Among the people who knew her and her coworkers, Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was admired and greatly respected, while simultaneously being very friendly. These sentiments were manifested at the annual celebrations of Professor's Name Day, which several generations of students and coworkers attended. They come to meet her and the colleagues as in a big family. She was very friendly and interested in the personal lives of her coworkers offering advices and help. Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz had also broad interest in other fields of science and culture and was interested in opinions and discussions on literature, theater, cinema and music.

Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz personality had several unique characteristics: she was a creative and courageous scientist with a vision, who did not hesitate to take up difficult research topics. She was the first to see the necessity of combining knowledge of neurology and rehabilitation. She was also the first one to be interested in neuromuscular diseases in children, and this interest culminated in her opening of a rehabilitation center for them. She was also a

pioneer in early rehabilitation after strokes that she indicated as crucial.

This creative strength and courage was fascinating for young scientists. Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz had the keen ability to attract and stimulate young people. She was very demanding and critical of her coworkers, however, anyone who was lucky enough to go through Prof. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz's training was prepared for clinical and scientific work as well as one can be. She also had an unusual relationship with patients and was interested in their everyday's life. She understood their needs and she was a founder of the Polish Neuromuscular Diseases Association that helps families of patients with neuromuscular diseases.

Prof. Irena Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz will be remembered as a person of extraordinary personality and great scientific achievements, a unique person blessed with not only a great mind, but also with personal charm and a great personal culture, elegance, and warmth. Her passing is a big loss for people who knew her personally and also for those whom she influenced by her work and activity. She will remain in our memory as an unusual and very important teacher, leader and friend. Prof. Irena Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz was to us a great person – an authority not only in science, but also, and perhaps above all – in human relations.

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