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**PROFESSOR WITOLD EUGENE ORŁOWSKI:  
LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF AN EMINENT  
POLISH INTERNIST**



Professor Witold Orłowski  
(Photo made in early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)

Professor Witold Eugene Orłowski was one of the greatest Polish physicians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was the creator of the famous school of internal medicine and an author of handbooks used by several generations of Polish internists.

Professor Witold Eugene (Witold Eugeniusz) Orłowski was born on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1874 (i.s. February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1874 in the Julian calendar) in Norwidpole, the region of Borysov in the Province of Minsk. He was a son of Francis Orłowski,

the administrator of the Polish estate of Tukally Milcz, and his wife Pauline Orłowska née Onichimowska. The Orlowskis moved to Vilna in 1882, and there Witold Orlowski graduated the Second Highschool in 1891 with a gold medal. During school time, he worked as a private tutor. He entered the Military Medical Academy in St. Petersburg in 1891. Five years latter, Orlowski graduated the Academy in November 1896, awarded with the Ivanov Award and received the diploma *cum eximia laude*. Still a student, in 1894, he was an author of a book of lectures on internal medicine delivered by Professor N. J. Sokolov. The book was prepared together with his brothers, Mieczysław Orlowski and Zenon Orlowski, also students of the Academy. Later, Zenon Orlowski also became a famous Polish internist.

After graduation, Witold Orlowski received additional medical training in bacteriology (Professor Serghei I. Botkin) and physiology (Professor Ivan P. Pavlov). The first medical working place of Witold Orlowski was an unpaid position at the University Hospital of Internal Medicine in St. Petersburg (24. XI. 1896–2. III. 1907). He worked under Professor Fedor Ignatevich Pasternatskii, famous balneologist, Associate Professor A. P. Favicki, and Professor V. N. Sirotinin. The title of doctor of medicine, Orlowski received on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1900 in St. Petersburg upon presentation of the thesis entitled: "*On the problem of bacteria-killing and uric acid solubilisative properties of urotropin and its therapeutical application in patients with urinary bladder inflammation*". After being granted the medical doctor title, Prof. Pasternackii offered to Orlowski the unpaid post of the head of the female ward at the Department of Internal Medicine. Still a student and than as a physician, Orlowski worked, since 1895, in the Caucasian health resort Essentuki. At first, during summer months, he carried out the medical laboratory work, later was an assistant of the spa physician (1902) and in the years 1903–1904, he held the post of the spa physician. Habilitation (*venian legendi*) he received in the field of internal medicine on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1903. Working mostly on unpaid positions Orlowski had a private practice in St. Petersburg (1903–1907), and during summer holidays in Essentuki (1903–1912).

Witold Orlowski was very active in the circles of the Polish emigration in Russia. He was co-founder of the Association of Polish Physicians in St. Petersburg and was its scientific secretaries (1903–1907). As a secretary, Orlowski published reports on the association activity in *Przegląd Lekarski* a medical journal appearing in Cracow. Thanks to these reports, some data about the association have been preserved to our days. In 1907, the Association was reorganized and the independent Society of Polish Physicians and Naturalists of St. Petersburg was founded. Professor Orlowski became the first honorary member of the society. In the progressive Russian journal *Rossiya*, he published the article on the need of teaching the Polish language in Russian schools in the areas inhabited by Poles. Despite some discussion on this subject, the Russian authorities refused to give to Polish minority some rights.

The further professional carrier of Orłowski was connected with the Kazan University. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1907, he became elected the extraordinary professor of internal medicine of this university. A few years later, Professor Orłowski became the head of the Department of Internal Medicine in Kazan (29.IV.1912). One year later, on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1913 he received the post of the ordinary professor at the Kazan University. He contributed a lot of to the reorganization of the Department and University Hospital. During the First World War, he was a member of the Executive Board of the Kazan Branch of the Committee for Assistance to War Victims. He organized protection of Polish war-prisoners and Poles displaced to this part of Russia. He organized three elementary schools, one high school, courses for illiterates and alms-houses for children. Professor Orłowski served as a teacher in these schools. He was also an organiser of so-called "the Polish House" with an amateur theatre and other Polish institutions. During the revolution 1917, besides his employment at the university, he became the main manager of the Provincial Hospital of Kazan Landed Aristocracy. He was a head of the school for hospital attendants. The school was associated with the hospital.

Professor Orłowski contributed a lot to elimination of disagreements in Polish organisations and associations in Kazan. Thanks to his efforts, the Polish Council was founded and different associations of Poles were united in this way. Prof. Orłowski became the head of the Council. He was also representative of Poles in the Municipal Council. Upon request of the municipal authorities, he organised popular lectures on medicine and hygiene for inhabitants of Kazan.

In 1916, Professor Orłowski became co-founder of the Polish medical journal *Polski Miesięcznik Lekarski* (*Polish Medical Monthly*) which was published in Kiev. He also contributed to the organization of medical services in the Polish Army organised in Russia. In September 1918, he moved from Kazan to Tomsk. There, he lectured on internal medicine and had a private practice. In August 1919, he moved to Irkutsk. He intended to organise the Red Cross Hospital and the Medical Faculty at the Irkutsk University. While in Irkutsk, Professor Orłowski received a message from the Jagiellonian University that he had been nominated to the post of the ordinary professor of internal medicine. The nomination was held on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1919 with a power since September 1st, 1919. Professor Orłowski began to lecture in January 1921. He did not accept the post of dean in the academic year 1921–1922. For two years, he was an administrative manager of the departments of medicine, surgery, ophthalmology and gynaecology. In a short time the Orłowski's department became an active research centre. He created conditions of mutual confidence and co-operation of his staff, which facilitated research work. Monthly scientific meetings at the Department of Internal Medicine became very popular and were continued as the meetings of the Cracow Division of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine. Beside them, weekly meetings of the staff were devoted to discussion of on-going research.

Professor Orłowski was very active; he was a member of the Executive Board of the Polish Scouting Association. In 1925, he organised the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Antituberculosis Congress and the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Congress of Physicians and Hygienic Activists of Local Municipality. He had also private practice in Cracow. On September 19th, 1925, Professor Orłowski was granted the post of the head of the 1<sup>st</sup> Department of Internal Medicine at the Warsaw University. He succeeded Professor Casimir Rzetkowski. He moved to Warsaw in January 1926 and became head of the department located in the Saint Spirit Hospital. Two years later, Professor Orłowski became head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Department of Internal Medicine at the Warsaw University, vacated by famous professor Anthony Głuziński. The department was located in the Child Jesus Hospital in Warsaw. In this department, Professor Orłowski created a modern medical centre. He founded several laboratories, including the metabolic laboratory, biochemical laboratory, bacteriological and serological laboratory, experimental animal station, electro-cardiographical laboratory as well as a number of outpatient's clinics (cardiological, antituberculosis, physical training and physiotherapeutical). Beside research, Professor Orłowski was involved in gradual and postgraduate training. Several courses were carried out at the department. He initiated post-graduate course in tropical medicine organised by the State Institute of Hygiene. Professor Orłowski was elected dean in the academic year 1935–1936. He changed organization of the Faculty Council as well as modernised practical training of medical students.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, Professor Orłowski was still at the department. Since early months of the Nazi occupation, he was engaged in the secret medical education, and in March 1944 became a dean of the underground medical faculty. During the Warsaw Uprising, the hospital was destroyed, the staff had to leave Warsaw. After liberation, Professor Orłowski organised hospitals in Brwinów and Grodzisk Mazowiecki. There, he began to teach students which come back after the war. On July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the hospital came back to Warsaw and in December 1945, training of medical students was resumed. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948, Professor Orłowski retired and on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1948 was granted a title of the honorary professor of pathology and therapy of internal diseases at the Warsaw University. He became head of the internal medicine ward at the Second Municipal Hospital (formerly St. Lazarus Hospital) in Warsaw. There, he was working from July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1949 to April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1957. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956 he became a head of the Fourth Department of Internal Medicine at the Institute for Postgraduate Training in Warsaw and was also head of the internal medicine ward in the Provincial Hospital in Warsaw. He retired finally at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1961 but continued research work and editorial work on new editions of his books.

Professor Orłowski died on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1966 in Warsaw and was buried at the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw.

It is very difficult to summarise the achievements of Professor Orłowski. He was one of great internists whose major success was to promote Polish medicine into modern state. His achievements cannot be estimated with a number of papers only or brilliant discoveries or descriptions. His name is not associated with any sign or syndrome. His contribution is more basic to medicine and health care. He created a school of his followers who carried out research in atmosphere of deep respect to real truth, to patients, to society and to his homeland. His life motto was belief that only those nations are able to create a firm independence, which can provide its own original research creativity. He believed that development of medicine was a significant part of progress in wisdom of the nation.

Professor Orłowski created a group of physicians who worked under conditions in many aspects better than those of famous foreign laboratories and were able to generate independent creative thinking and to carry out valuable research. His writings and handbooks was basic material for training a number of generations of Polish physicians. In this aspect, although his name is almost unknown to the world history of medicine, it has to be placed in the same row with those whose discoveries are commonly known to the medical world. Service to mankind can be reached both by genial discoveries of single phenomena, drugs or surgical procedures as well as by creating a significant group of up-to-date educated physicians with high moral, clinical and scientific skills. Polish medicine owns so much to Professor Witold Eugene Orłowski.

Professor Orłowski published more than 200 papers, which appeared in Polish, Russian, German, French, Czech, Bulgarian, Portugal and Spanish. His close co-workers published 563 papers during the time when he was a head of the group. His research interest covered all branches of internal medicine. His special interest was focused on cardiovascular disorders, metabolic disease rheumatology as well as pathology and clinics of the gastrointestinal tract and tuberculosis. The main general achievement of Professor Witold Orłowski was to stimulate the research on pathophysiology of the diseases and in this field he created the school which then was continued in world medicine. He was one of the firsts in the world who described the systemic nature of the cardiac failure and contribution to its pathogenesis of vascular dilatation and organ involvement. Professor Orłowski described several biochemical abnormalities related to cardiac failure as well as investigated the hemodynamics – metabolic relationship in these patients. He was one of the firsts who investigated systemic effects of acidosis. Professor Orłowski focused also on pharmacotherapy of urinary tract infections. His observations in this field are still of value for medical practice. He made new observations in the pharmacotherapy of cardiovascular system, e.g. his research was based for elimination of barium chloride from the drug list of cardiac agents. In the field of gastroenterology, he elaborated new methods for evaluation gastric secretion and made research on diabetes. Professor Orłowski was a pioneer of rheumatology in Poland. In 1930,

he was elected the first president of the Polish Society Against Arthritis. In his department, the first Rheumatological outpatients Clinic was opened and he was first who lectured on rheumatology to medical students in Poland. He made significant contribution to endocrinology and the last volume of his main work was the first Polish handbook of endocrinology.

Professor Orłowski became famous as the author of several handbooks. Still in Kazan, he published in Russian "Handbook of clinical urinalysis" (Kazan 1910). His handbook "*Diagnostics of internal diseases*" (in Polish) was reedited three times before the Second World War. Two volumes of "*Pathology and therapy of internal disorders*" (in Polish) was published in 1933 and in 1938. Very popular was a handbook entitled "*An outline of general medical diagnostics*" (in Polish) published in 1947 and four-times reedited. A recent new edition was published in 1994 rewritten by followers of Professor Orłowski and edited by his son, Professor Thaddeus Orłowski.

The main work of Professor Orłowski is the multivoluminous handbook in Polish "*Choroby wewnętrzne*" ("*Treatise on internal diseases*"). The book appeared for the first time in eight volumes. The first volume appeared in 1947 and was four times reedited. The last volume of this first edition was published in 1957. The handbook by Orłowski was a basic book of internal medicine for several generations of Polish internists. In 1978, the new edition of the Orłowski's treatise appeared in print and later three new editions were published (1978, 1989 and 1992).

Professor Orłowski was a tutor of 33 habilitations (theses for a title of associate professor). Among his associates such famous Polish internists should be listed: Demetrius Aleksandrow, Andrew Biernacki, Valentine Hartwig, Joseph Hornowski, Eugene Kodejszko, Conrad Josierodzki, Joseph John Kostrzewski, Wenceslaw Markert, Janine Misiewicz, Thaddeus Orłowski, a son of Professor Orłowski, Eleonore Reichert, John Roguski, Edward Rużyłło, Joseph Rydygier, Edward Szczeklik, Thaddeus Tempka. Professor Orłowski was an active member of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine since his return to independent Poland. The meetings at the Department of Internal Medicine in Cracow were continued as the meetings of the Cracow Division of the Society. At the first Congress of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine. The journal Polish Archives of Internal Medicine was founded in 1923. Professor Orłowski became the member of the editorial Board since its foundation. In the years 1929–1949, he was the editor-in-chief and later to the end his life, he was a member of the Editorial Board. He was elected president of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine in years 1925–1925. As the editor-in-chief of the journal, he was a member of the Society's Executive Board since 1929 to 1949. The face of Professor Witold Orłowski is depicted on the Honorary Medal of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine among the seven most outstanding Polish internists in the whole history of Polish medicine. In 1949, he was elected the honorary member of the Polish Society of Internal Medicine.

Professor Orłowski was a full member of the Academy of Medicine (1920), the Warsaw Scientific Society (1927), and the Polish Academy of Letters (1930) as well as its successors, the Polish Academy of Sciences (1951). He also was member of the Łódz Scientific Society and the New York Academy of Sciences (1959). He was also a member of *Union Therapeutique*, *Union Internationale contre la Tuberculose*, International Society of Internal Medicine, *Societe Francaise de Cardiologie*. Many societies graded him a title of honorary member. He was editor-in-chief "Proceedings of the Medical Division of the Polish Academy of Sciences" (1956–1966) and a member of the Editorial Board of a number of journals. He was awarded several medals and awards, including The State Award (the First Grade), Research Award of the Polish Academy of Sciences, The Banner of Work Order, The Cross-Polonia Restituta (twice) as well as Bulgarian *Lion Order*, Russian *Saint Stanislaus Order*, *Saint Ann Order*. He was a laureate of several honours and awards. The Jagellonian University, the Warsaw University and the Łódz Medical school granted him the title of *doctor honoris causa*.

Professor Orłowski was married to Aline née Trzeciakowska. They had four children. The oldest daughter Alina Krajewska was an agrotechnician and teacher of German. She was the author of handbook of German language for medical and pharmaceutical students, Witold, the son was a chemist, the daughter Irene was a dentist and the son Thaddeus is a famous internists-nephrologist.

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## Summary

Professor Witold Eugene Orłowski was born on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1874 in Norwidpole in the Province of Minsk. He received education in Vilno and St. Petersburg and after graduation of medicine in 1896 was working at the University Hospital in St. Petersburg. He received habilitation in 1903. In 1907–1917, Professor Orłowski was in Kazan where he was a head of the Department of Internal Medicine. When Poland became independent, he returned to his homeland and was Professor of Internal Medicine in Cracow and Warsaw. The last four decades of his life, Orłowski spent in Warsaw. There he created a great medical school and contributed significantly to medical research. He died on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1966 in Warsaw.

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