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The 20th Congress of the Nationwide Alliance of Alzheimer's Organisations and The Scientific Conference: PUBLIC HEALTH – Problems of the elderly and their families

Report

On 1–3 June 2018, the 20th Congress of the Nationwide Alliance of Alzheimer's Organizations took place at the University of Zielona Góra, in the seat of the Rector's Office, at 9 Licealna Street in Zielona Góra. So far, the Congresses have been held cyclically and had a nationwide character. This year's Congress was held in Zielona Góra for the first time.

This does not mean, however, that Zielona Góra, the University of Zielona Góra or the Lubuskie Association for the Support of Carers and Persons Affected by Alzheimer's Disease were not known to the participants of the Congress. They have often visited Zielona Góra on the occasion of previous undertakings related to Alzheimer's disease, the problems of patients and their families.

As part of this year's Congress, the Scientific Conference "Public Health – the problems of the elderly and their families" was also held.

The organizers of the Conference and the Congress were: the University of Zielona Góra (Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology) and the Lubuskie Association for the Support of Carers and Persons Affected by Alzheimer's Disease¹.

¹ The Organizing Committee of the Congress and the Conference was composed of: secretaries: Dr. Agnieszka Nowicka, Jan Wyżykowski University in Pol-

This is yet another joint undertaking that meets social needs and tackles an important problem, not only for the sick, but also for their families and carers. The importance of the problem and the scale of the phenomenon leads to the conclusion that this is a growing social issue and there is a need to undertake assistance activities in the field of diagnosis of elderly people, the situation of sick people, support to those affected by the disease and systemic support for their careers and families.

The invitation to the Scientific Committee of the Congress and the Conference was accepted by people who are not indifferent to the difficult situation of people with disabilities, the sick, their families and who take action on their behalf in their work, but also experience the daily care of the elderly or persons affected by Alzheimer's disease. The Scientific Committee included: dr hab. Grażyna Miłkowska, prof. of UZ (University of Zielona Góra), President of the Lubuskie Association for the Support of Carers and Persons Affected by Alzheimer's Disease, Zielona Góra; dr Agnieszka Nowicka, Jan Wyżykowski University, Polkowice; dr Katarzyna Uzar-Szcześniak, Wrocław University; dr Jolanta Lipińska-Lokś, University of Zielona Góra.

The Honorary Patronage over the Conference was provided by: the Marshal of Lubuskie Voivodship Elżbieta, Anna Polak, the Mayor of Zielona Góra, Janusz Kubicki, the Rector of the University of Zielona Góra, Prof. dr hab. inż. Tadeusz Kuczyński. The Media Patronage was provided by Gazeta Lubuska.

The participants were greeted by: on behalf of the Marshal of Lubuskie Voivodship, Elżbieta Anna Polak: Mirosław Dulat – Deputy Director of the Health Department of the Marshal's Office in Zielona Góra, on behalf of the Mayor of Zielona Góra, Janusz Kubicki: Lidia Gryko – Deputy Head of the Department of Education and Social Affairs of the Municipal Office in Zielona Góra, on behalf of the Rector of the University of Zielona Góra Prof. dr hab. inż. Tadeusz Kuczyński: dr hab. M. Furmanek, prof. of UZ –

kowice (formerly an assistant professor at the University of Zielona Góra), Wioleta Baziuk, MA, day care centre „Senior – Wigor” in Zielona Góra, Lubuskie Association for the Support of Carers and Persons Affected by Alzheimer's Disease; PhD students at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of the University of Zielona Góra: Krzysztof Łoziński MA, Sławomir Sobański MA, Astina Koch MA, Karolina Silna MA, Mateusz Kuźmik MA; Marta Nowicka MA, Jan Wyżykowski University in Polkowice (graduate of the University of Zielona Góra).

Dean of the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology at the University of Zielona Góra and Dr. G. Miłkowska, Prof. of UZ – President of the Lubuskie Association for the Support of Carers and Persons Affected by Alzheimer's Disease.

The Conference was addressed to the academic, pedagogical and medical community, as well as the local community. Nearly 60 people took part in the conference, including:

- 1) representatives of organisations and associations from all over the country,
- 2) university teachers and doctoral students of the University of Zielona Góra dealing with the problems of the elderly,
- 3) carers and families of sick persons and persons with a potential interest in the subject matter,
- 4) employees of local government offices (ROPS, MOPS) and representatives of the National Health Fund.

During the Conference, all the objectives (common for the Conference and the 20th Congress) were implemented, namely:

- 1) promotion of the principles of health prevention in the field of dementia and the methods of their implementation,
- 2) getting to know the actions undertaken by Alzheimer Europe aimed at improving patients' access to diagnosis and treatment of all age-related diseases, in particular Alzheimer's disease,
- 3) presentation of initiatives undertaken in the Lubuskie Voivodship to improve the lives of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and their carers,
- 4) promotion and sharing of experience concerning the measures and good practices in the field of systemic support for persons suffering from dementia and their families, and in particular those suffering from Alzheimer's dementia – developed in institutions all over Poland.

The conference was mostly educational in nature. Both the presentations made in the poster session and the conference presentations in the plenary session allowed to present important, current issues and enrich the awareness of the participants. The participants were presented with examples of good practices related to actions taken with and for the benefit of persons with Alzheimer's disease, which provided food for thought.

The following issues were presented in the poster session:

- Dr. Jolanta Lipińska-Lokś, University of Zielona Góra: *Old age as a phase in the human life cycle*,

- Marta Nowicka, MA, Jan Wyżykowski University, Polkowice: *Health problems of elderly people*,
- Krzysztof Łoziński, MA, PhD student at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of the University of Zielona Góra: *Stereotypes and prejudices towards the elderly*,
- Astina Koch, MA, PhD student at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of the University of Zielona Góra: *Alzheimer's disease – between theory and practice*,
- Mateusz Kuźmik, MA, PhD student at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of the University of Zielona Góra: *The Clock Test*,
- Karolina Silna, MA, PhD student at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of the University of Zielona Góra: *Alzheimer's disease – causes and related problems*,
- Sławomir Sobański, MA, PhD student at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of the University of Zielona Góra: *Problems of carers of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease*

During the Conference, the participants also listened to many contributions to the plenary sessions:

- 1) Dr hab. Agnieszka Zembroń-Łacny, Prof. of UZ: *The neuroprotective influence of physical effort in Alzheimer's disease*,
- 2) Zygmunt Wierzyński, MA, President of Alzheimer Polska: *Presentation of the strategy of Alzheimer Polska – part 1*,
- 3) Substituting for Dr hab. Waldemar Sługocki, Prof. of UZ, Senator of the Republic of Poland – Dr Sławomir Kotylak: *Public health in the aspect of the elderly, the disabled and their carers*,
- 4) Dr hab. Grażyna Miłkowska, prof. of UZ – President of the Lubuskie Association for the Support for Carers and Persons Affected by Alzheimer's disease in Zielona Góra: *Old age – derived thoughts and personal reflections*, Inauguration of open lectures,
- 5) Krzysztof Łoziński, MA, PhD student at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology, UZ, Zielona Góra: *Alzheimer's disease from the perspective of demographic changes*,
- 6) Dr Edyta Długosz, Community Self-help Centre for people with Alzheimer's disease "Mefazja" in Lublin: *Problems of the elderly and their families, including Alzheimer's disease in particular*,
- 7) Dr Agnieszka Nowicka, Jan Wyżykowski University, Polkowice: *"The Carer's Syndrome as a consequence of long-term care for a person with Alzheimer's type dementia*,

- 8) Marta Nowicka, MA, Jan Wyżykowski University, Polkowice: *Alzheimer's disease as a source of physical, mental and social burden for family carers*,
- 9) Dr Katarzyna Uzar-Szcześniak, University of Wrocław, Wrocław: *Non-pharmacological methods of dementia therapy – types, effectiveness, practice*,
- 10) Ewa Duda, MA, KTOTO – Understanding Alzheimer's Disease Foundation, Osiny: *Alzheimer and Me – together we will understand. A project of a support network for the carers of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia syndromes*,
- 11) Barbara Stafiej, MA, Podkarpackie Association of Support for Persons with Alzheimer's Disease, Rzeszów: *The Conscious Carer Club as part of the "Generator of Innovation. Support Networks" Programme*.

On the second day of the Congress, on the day of the conference, in the afternoon, the participants visited the day care centre "Senior – Wigor" in Zielona Góra, where the conference entitled *The Exchange of Good Practices* was held. This part of the conference included practical presentations and workshops, illustrating the possibilities of working with people with Alzheimer's disease:

- Wioletta Baziuk, MA, day care centre "Senior – Wigor", Zielona Góra: *Support of the environment for people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and their families*,
- Agnieszka Żelwetro, MA, Alzheimer's Centre in Ścinawa, University of Humanities and Social Sciences in Wrocław: *About Reminiscence Theatre – how to show memories?*²,
- Dr Dorota Niewiedział, University of Zielona Góra: *Crisis in the family affected by Alzheimer's disease presented in systemic terms and methods to overcome it*³,

During this part of the Conference, representatives of Alzheimer Polska undertook: *"Work on the strategy of Alzheimer Polska's activity and development of recommendations for the Polish Alzheimer's Plan, part"*.

The third day of the Congress was very eventful, particularly for members of Alzheimer's organizations. Dorota Siwiec, MA, Chief Specialist of

² The speech delivered by Agnieszka Żelwetro, MA, was prolonged as it aroused great interest of the participants and was followed by numerous questions.

³ Dr Dorota Niewiedział accepted the invitation of the organizers in the absence of J. Czarnecka, MA.

the Labour Law and Social Security Department, Warsaw, in her speech entitled *The situation of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and the activities of the Ombudsman in this area*, ensured about the openness and favourable attitude of both the Ombudsman and herself.

Dr. Edyta Długosz, Vice President of Alzheimer Polska, recalled the *Assumptions of the Polish Alzheimer's Plan*. A plan which, although very important, natural and obvious, is still waiting for implementation.

The *Debate* with Piotr Bromber, MA, Director of the National Health Fund of the Lubuskie Voivodship Branch in Zielona Góra caused a lot of emotions. The issues raised by the participants of the Debate, who experience everyday life affected by Alzheimer's disease and act on behalf of other people suffering from Alzheimer's disease, concerned, among other things: the possibility and necessity of introducing screening tests to diagnose the problem of Alzheimer's disease at a relatively early stage: problems with a proper "place for people with Alzheimer's disease and their families in the system of help and support in Poland"; issues of raising public awareness of the disease, support for the affected people and their families. From the perspective of the National Health Fund, issues related to Alzheimer's disease, people affected by the disease and their families and carers are important, but at the same time difficult, as solutions are required at the decision-making level so that implementers of legal regulations are equipped with appropriate competences in the provision of services. Difficulties resulting from the lack of human resources, i.e. general practitioners, family doctors and specialists in geriatrics were also pointed out. It was suggested that the associations should continue to be involved and that real solutions should be sought. Perseverance and further dialogue were recommended.

An important part of the last day of the Congress was the speech delivered by Zygmunt Wierzyński, MA, President of Alzheimer Polska: *Presentation of recommendations for the Polish Alzheimer's Plan*. This included the conclusions and recommendations developed during the discussion at the Congress:

- "Work on the implementation of the Polish Alzheimer's Plan should be intensified. Seven years after its preparation and following numerous efforts of representatives of Alzheimer's organizations, as well as the Ombudsman and individual Members of Parliament, there is still no political will to adopt the plan for implementation. The participants of the Congress passed a resolution on forwarding

- relevant motions to the Senior Policy Committee of the Sejm and Senate, as well as MPs and senators from particular districts,
- There is a need to integrate activities undertaken by organisations, foundations and associations working for the benefit of people with Alzheimer's disease and their carers with the activities of other entities, especially the Polish Alzheimer's Society,
 - In view of the disturbing statistics, it is essential to raise public awareness of Alzheimer's disease – its causes, course and impact on the functioning of patients and their families. Social campaigns with the use of mass media should play an important role in these activities. Especially during the World Alzheimer's Month, which takes place every year in September around the world⁴.

The discussion ending the 20th Congress led to another conclusion, namely, that we should "keep up the good work" for people with Alzheimer's disease, because this is the only chance to achieve goals, improve the quality of life of the families and carers of the sick, and to relieve them and their loved ones from the suffering.

The organizers of the Congress and Conference were then thanked for their efforts, kind reception and substantive discussions, as well as a moment of rest (during coffee breaks, walks and meetings in the *Lubuskie Winemaking Centre in Zabór*).

The 20th Congress of the Nationwide Alliance of Alzheimer's Organisations ended with a warm good-bye to all the participants and the announcement of the next meeting.

In the opinion of the participants and organizers, the Congress and Conference were well realized.⁵ The assumed results were achieved and the task was implemented:

- there was a constructive exchange of experience, raising participants' awareness of the problems related to Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Recommendations were developed to speed up the implementation of the Polish Alzheimer's Plan,
- this initiative has made the community (not only the local community) aware of: the problem of dignified ageing, the urgent need to im-

⁴ G. Miłkowska, Press release – 20th Nationwide Congress of Alzheimer's Organisations, Zielona Góra, 3.06.2018.

⁵ A public task co-financed with public funds received from the Marshal of the Lubuskie Voivodship and the Mayor of Zielona Góra.

prove the quality of life and living standards, to promote and ensure opportunities for active ageing, and to create conditions that enable carers of older people to reconcile work and family life (the need to care for parents or other dependants).

The obtained results are of great importance, as they are consistent with the area of health protection of the elderly, which is identified as one of the most important issues in the senior policy in Poland, as described in the Appendix to Resolution No. 238 of the Council of Ministers of 24 December 2013 (item 118): *Assumptions of Long-term Senior Policy in Poland for the years 2014–2020*.

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