Professor Stanisław Kohlmünzer, Ph.D. Honoris Causa
(1919–2001)

OBITUARY

Professor Stanisław Kohlmünzer, whose scientific and professional career was associated with the Institute of Pharmacology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Collegium Medicum of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków since late fifties till his last days, passed away on November 4th this year. He was the head (1960–1972) and scientific consultant at the Department of Phytochemistry of our institute, member (1966–1998) and vice-chairman (1990–1998) of Scientific Council, and member of Editorial Committee of the Polish Journal of Pharmacology (1966–1993). He also headed the Chair of Pharmaceutical Botany at the Collegium Medicum (1972–1989 and 1996–1999) and fulfilled a number of functions at the Jagiellonian University.

Professor S. Kohlmünzer was born on August 11th, 1919 in Warszawa. He commenced his pharmaceutical studies in that city and continued them in Kraków after the World War II was finished, having graduated in pharmacy at the Jagiellonian University in 1945. After graduation, he worked first at public pharmacies and Medicinal Plant Processing Company “Herbapol” in Kraków, to join later (in 1957) research team of Professor Janusz Supniewski at the Department of Pharmacology (Institute of Pharmacology at present), Polish Academy of Sciences, in Kraków. Almost simultaneously (in 1958), he started scientific cooperation with the Chair of Pharmaceutical Botany at the Medical Academy (Collegium Medicum of the Jagiellonian University at present). There he prepared his doctoral thesis (1959) and a dissertation qualifying for assistant professorship (1966). He was awarded a title of associate professor in 1976 and full professor in 1985. He was a professor conferring doctor’s degree on 12 candidates, and he supervised preparation of two theses qualifying doctors as assistant professors, and many Master’s theses.

Professor S. Kohlmünzer published over 150 papers, including original scientific articles, reviews, popular science articles and communications at scientific conferences. His notable achievement was preparation of the textbook entitled
Pharmacognosy, a unique encyclopedia summarizing knowledge about natural medicinal products for young researchers, students and pharmacists, whose five editions have hitherto been published. Professor S. Kohlmünzer was also a co-author of entries in Lexicon of Pharmacy, author of a chapter in Home Medical Guide (2 editions), and translator of three German books on herbal medicinal products and homeopathic drugs into Polish.

Early scientific research of Professor S. Kohlmünzer was inspired by Professor J. Supniewski and focused on chemical and pharmacological studies of indole alkaloids of Catharanthus roseus (Vinca rosea), the medicinal plant poorly known at that time, which led inter alia to the isolation of ajmalicine (δ-yohimbine) from roots of that species, and patenting the isolation procedure. He investigated also photoactive furanocoumarins from Ammi majus and other species. The method of isolation of these compounds, developed in the course of those studies was delivered to Pharmaceutical Company “Polfa” in Kutno. Later studies of Professor S. Kohlmünzer at the Department of Phytochemistry concentrated on chemical analysis of different secondary metabolites of medicinal plants and plant tissue cultures. A discovery of new natural products, mainly of sesquiterpenoid group, isolated from plant species of Asteraceae family, which had not been examined earlier, constitutes significant contribution to the development of plant chemistry. Thanks to personal commitment of Professor S. Kohlmünzer, new chromatographic and spectral methods of phytochemical analysis were introduced in the department. It is worth to mention that emiline, a pyrrolizidine alkaloid of Emilia flammea was the first new natural compound isolated at the department in 1970. Structural studies of this alkaloid included for the first time mass and 1H-NMR spectroscopy. Over the next years, Professor S. Kohlmünzer closely observed extraordinary progress in various spectral techniques, emphasizing necessity to constant training of the team in this field. Professor S. Kohlmünzer deserves also the credit for the inspiration of chemical and biological studies into polysaccharides of higher fungi and implementation of this unique in our country research direction at the Department of Pharmaceutical Botany, and establishing cooperation in this area with research centers abroad (France, Japan). Among the studied polysaccharides, tylopilan was the most extensively investigated compound. It is a branched β-glucan, isolated from Tylopus fel- leus, whose immunomodulatory and antineoplastic properties were demonstrated and confirmed by numerous experiments. Tylopilan isolation procedure was patented. Furthermore, mycelial cultures of T. felleus and other fungal species were proposed as an alternative source of polysaccharides. Plant tissue cultures were also used to study aforementioned furanocoumarins.

Professor S. Kohlmünzer was an excellent popularizer of knowledge on medicinal plants and their active constituents not only by publishing articles in popular science journals but also delivering lectures at different meetings where he was frequently invited, participating in radio and television interviews, and engaging in the activities of Herbal Meetings in Lublin. As an expert in the area of natural medicinal products, he was a member of Polish Pharmacopoeial Committee, Experimental Therapy Committee and Committee for Drug Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, having been the chair of its Commission of Natural Drugs and Biotechnology. Moreover, he was a member of Scientific Council of the Research Institute of Medicinal Plants in Poznań, Editorial Board of Herba Polonica, and Editorial Committees of Acta Biologica Cracoviensia Seria Botanica and Acta Poloniæ Pharmaceutica. He belonged to many Polish and foreign scientific associations. In token of his scientific, didactic and organizational achievements, Professor S. Kohlmünzer was decorated with many orders and medals, including Knight Cross of Polonia Restituta Order, National Education Medal and I. Łukasiewicz Medal. He was awarded a title of doctor honoris causa by the Medical Academy in Lublin in 1995.

Comprehensive, encyclopedic knowledge of Professor S. Kohlmünzer about medicinal plants and their active constituents, embracing the newest scientific discoveries stimulated discussions among his co-workers and inspired new research directions. Professor S. Kohlmünzer was a paragon of diligence, activity and devotion to science. He was full of optimism and treated everyone exceptionally kindly, enjoying common respect and sympathy. We are bereaved of eminent scientist, academic teacher, and also of a mentor and inspirer.

Wanda Kisiel