

Prof. Dr. Božena Ravnihar: Her 80th anniversary



It is the people whose work has brought outstanding results, that are usually remembered when they celebrate their jubilees, remembered for their exceptional drive and distinguished abilities. Professor Ravnihar dedicated her professional, creative and intellectual potential to The Institute of Oncology in Ljubljana and to the development and growth of the Slovenian oncology. As such she is honoured and will be remembered by her students and colleagues.

In 1946, she joined The Institute of Oncology as its Head of Laboratory Department, after having graduated at Belgrade Medical Faculty in 1940, worked as an intern for a year, and

having spent more than three years as an active member of the Partisan Medical Forces.

At the time of her arrival, the Institute consisted of Surgery and Gynaecological Departments and a small Radiotherapy Department. Her task was to set up the histological and clinical laboratories, and to specialize in oncology at the same time. The work in the newly established histology laboratory started in 1946. Professor Ravnihar was not only its Head; she also worked as a pathologist which enabled her to gain knowledge of histopathology of tumours.

She was able to enlarge her self-taught knowledge by studying at foreign institutions like Radiumhemmet in Stockholm, Radiumstationem in Kopenhagen, Institut du Radium Foundation Currie in Paris and later, at the Department of Radiotherapy at the Zurich Hospital. In 1953 she became an Assistant Professor of Radiotherapy and Oncology, having also obtained the specialization in these fields and gained some experience in nuclear medicine at home and abroad.

In 1958/59 she won a scholarship to study in the USA where she visited the leading institutions and obtained some knowledge of the organized forms of cancer prevention.

After that, her work at the Institute was extremely multifarious: she was the Head of the Laboratory Department, the Head of the Radiotherapy Department, the Head of the Cancer Registry of Slovenia, the Head of the Epidemiology Studies, and the Assistant Director of the Institute of Oncology. Under her leadership and with full support of the Director of the Institute of Oncology, prof. dr. Leo Šavnik, the Institute grew and developed into a modern clinical, educational and research centre.

Numerous new departments in different fields of treatment and research were established and encouraged to develop under her directorship from 1964 to 1982. They were, for example, the Clinical Department, the Radiotherapy Department, complete with all the latest equipment, and the Laboratories into which all the modern examination techniques had been introduced.

Especially important from the patients' point of view were the following services: psycho-oncology, physiotherapy and social medicine, and the policy of adopting the modern concept of multidisciplinary and team work in treating the various forms of cancer.

Professor Ravnihar recognized the great value of research for the development of oncology. In the early sixties already, she was the one who gave initiative for the research work, although the staff potential and the working conditions were still quite modest. She put a special emphasis on systematic planning of the research, her scheme of research planning in medicine had been widely used by all research institutions in Slovenia for many years. She established a research foundation at the Institute of Oncology and determined its grant-awarding principles. The research work, carried out at the Institute was at her instigation made a part of bigger research programmes on the state and international level. As a result, the Institute of Oncology was given a university status and quite an impressive number of academic distinctions were awarded to her colleagues at the time of her directorship of the Institute (20 PhD's, 10 MSc's, 2 academic specializations, and 17 of her colleagues were made university teachers). Many of them remember Professor Ravnihar as their thesis supervisor; the commitment and dedication to work was certainly one of the unforgettable and everlasting features which were passed on from her to younger generations. The results of their common endeavour are quite impressive: more than a hundred professional publications home and abroad per year, international awards won by numerous scientists working at the Institute,

awards given by The Boris Kidrič foundation, and many other scientific distinctions.

Professor Ravnihar was especially interested in developing research documentation infrastructure: the membership of the Institute Library and the Indok Centre of the international Cancernet, is only one of the results of her endeavours in this field. In 1964, she and her fellow workers established the radiology and oncology journal *Radiologia Iugoslavica*, which had been published for 25 years, and is now published under the title *Radiology and Oncology*. Professor Ravnihar was its first Editor-in-Chief.

One of her most important achievements was the establishing of Cancer Registry as early as 1949. After that, every case of cancer had to be registered under Slovenian law, which made the Registry a reliable and valuable source of information. Cancer Registry of Slovenia was one of the first of its kind in Europe and the means of connecting The Institute of Oncology and Slovenian medical research with the rest of the world. Professor Ravnihar's work in this field was internationally recognized: she had been the Head of the European and Middle East Branch of The International Association of Cancer Registries for three years.

She was also active in the development of medical studies on all levels. In 1947, the Chair for Oncology and Radiotherapy at the Medical Faculty of Ljubljana was founded, also at her instigation. After that, she was actively engaged in preparing the curricula of the medical and stomatological courses at the Medical Faculty. On the post-graduate level, Professor Ravnihar had made it possible for radiotherapy and oncology to become an independent field of specialization, and introduced the study of its basic principles into the majority of post-graduate medical courses. Her contributions to educating general public at home and abroad were considerable, too. She was the member of the UICC from 1960 to 1962.

Besides being a distinguished academic and scientist, Professor Ravnihar was also a great administrator. Under her directorship the Institute of Oncology was considerably enlarged,

renovated and modernized. But one of her greatest wishes, namely the erection of a new building, which could house all the various departments and wards of the Institute, has not been realized yet.

Since she was also involved in preparing its building plans, may her next anniversary bring about the commencement of the building of the new Institute!

And may she be as active as she has been all her life – and remain the guiding spirit for all her numerous students and colleagues, who wish her many happy returns of this day!

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