

Ante Šerčer: the most prominent otorhinolaryngologist of Croatian medicine

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This year, we are marking the 130th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Ante Šerčer, the most prominent and internationally recognized Croatian otorhinolaryngologist (Figure 1). Dr. Šerčer was born in Požega on April 12, 1896, into a family of German origin. His father, Dr. Ivan Scherzer, served in the Austrian civil service and in 1900 was appointed professor at the Nautical School in Dubrovnik. Ante, therefore, attended elementary school and classical gymnasium in Dubrovnik. He studied medicine in Graz and Prague, and on October 25, 1919, obtained his medical degree from the Czech University in Prague. During his medical studies, he worked in various departments of the Sisters of Charity Hospital in Zagreb. There, he met Professor Dragutin Mašek, one of the founders of the Zagreb University School of Medicine, who inspired Šerčer's interest in otorhinolaryngology. After graduating, Šerčer spent a year training at the clinics of Professors Kukula and Kutvirt in Prague, and Professors Neumann and Hajek in Vienna (1).

In 1920, Professor Mašek transferred the leadership of his so-called Third Department of the Sisters of Charity Hospital to Dr. Aleksandar Blašković, while beginning preparations for establishing the first Clinic for Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases at the Zagreb University School of Medicine. On August 1, 1920, Šerčer was appointed assistant at the Otorhinolaryngology Clinic in Zagreb, which marked the beginning of his academic career at the School of Medicine. A year later, the clinic, under the leadership of Professor Mašek and his assistant Šerčer, began operating on the premises of a public school on Draškovićeva Street. That same year, on October 22, Professor Mašek delivered a lecture entitled "The Scope and Importance of Otorhinolaryngology." This lecture represented the first clinical medicine lecture delivered to students at the newly established University School of Medicine. In 1933, the clinic was moved to Šalata, into a newly constructed building intended for the clinics of the School of Medicine. In 2007, it was relocated to Rebro, within the University Hospital Center Zagreb, where it operates today (2). Following the retirement of Professor Mašek in 1929, the School Council entrusted Ante Šerčer with the leadership of the clinic. He remained head of the clinic until 1945.

Dr. Šerčer mentored numerous physicians not only from Yugoslavia but also from many other countries, including Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Austria, and South American countries. Šerčer became an assistant professor in 1927, an associate professor in 1929, and a full professor at the Zagreb School of Medicine in 1932. He also served as dean of the School on two occasions, from 1936 to 1937 and from 1943 to 1945.

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He became the first Croatian clinician to achieve broad international recognition as a result of his discovery of nasothoracic reflexes, explanation of the development of nasal septum deformities and otosclerosis, and innovative plastic and reconstructive procedures of the nose and auricle. In 1930, at only 34 years of age, he became a corresponding member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (today the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts), and in 1937 he became the first physician elected as a full member (3). As early as 1929, he was also elected to Collegium O.R.L.A.S., an international society of the most eminent otorhinolaryngologists, in which he remained active until the end of his life. Šercer treated numerous prominent members of high society, ranging from the Yugoslav royal family to the legendary American trumpeter Louis Armstrong, the renowned opera singer Mario del Monaco, and the Italian tenor Giuseppe Di Stefano. Šercer's initiative and efforts served as an incentive for the foundation of the School of Medicine in Sarajevo in 1944.

After the end of the Second World War, Šercer became a victim of the new communist authorities, undergoing a two-month trial during which he lost his civil rights and academic qualifications. He was expelled from the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts. In September 1946, he was rehabilitated and appointed head of the Department of Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases at the Sisters of Charity Hospital. Under his leadership, the department was modernized and began teaching medical students in 1955, while in 1964 it was granted the status of a clinic. The Zagreb School of Medicine later corrected the injustice done to Šercer, and in 1954 he was invited back and elected full professor. He retired in 1966 and died in Zagreb on June 25, 1968 (4). In 1991, he was posthumously rehabilitated by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Ante Šercer published 170 scientific papers, widely cited in numerous international journals, textbooks, and professional manuals. Of these, 109 were published in leading international journals, including works such as *Contribution à l'étude du sclérome* (Acta Oto-Laryngologica, Stockholm, 1925) and *Plastische Operationen an der Nase und an der Ohrmuschel* (Stuttgart, 1962). His major work, ENT Propaedeutics (1951), represents a comprehensive collection not only of his own observations but also of contributions by internationally renowned otorhinolaryngologists addressing various professional issues.

Šercer possessed exceptional surgical versatility. In rhinology, he developed a transseptal approach to the pituitary gland, which continues to be used in modern practice. His research on the relationship between the upright posture of humans and the bending of the skull base attracted considerable attention (5,6). He also performed fenestration surgery for otosclerosis and carried out the first decortication plastic surgery of the nose in rhinology. He served as editor-in-chief of the Medical Encyclopedia and the Otorhinolaryngology volume published by the Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute. Posthumously, he was awarded the Diploma of the City of Zagreb. Today, a street in Zagreb bears his name, as does a lecture hall at the Zagreb University School of Medicine. The Croatian Academy of Medical Sciences awards the "Ante Šercer" Prize for the best scientific paper.

In conclusion, the life and work of Ante Šercer remain remarkable not only for Croatian otorhinolaryngology but also for Croatian medicine as a whole. He devoted his entire life to science and his profession, guided by



FIGURE 1. Dr. Ante Šercer (1896-1968)

strong ethical, moral, and academic principles – clearly reflected in his message: “Therefore, nothing remains for us but to work in the conviction that our future work, built upon the foundations already created, will be even more successful and beneficial; for the success of honest work is our faith, work is our passion, and the clinic is our love.” (7).

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