

Professor Milan Špála, MD., PhD. – 1930–2018

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Figure 1 – Professor Milan Špála, MD., PhD.

The Impact Factor, the citation index, the Institute for Scientific Information, Thomson Reuters and the whole of scientometry had long been common concepts in the academic world. It was not so in the communist bloc countries. Professor Milan Špála, MD., PhD. was one of the limited number of experts in Czechoslovakia who in the 1980s monitored the development of scientometric, bibliographic and database support for research in medicine and the natural sciences. Professor Špála shared his knowledge with unwavering enthusiasm at first with his close colleagues, and after the change of regime throughout the academic community. He made a significant contribution to the fact that we in the Czech Republic also adopted information support for science. In 1990 he founded the bibliographic-information department of the Institute of Scientific Information at the First Faculty of

Medicine at Charles University, which he also managed until the year 2000. At Charles University he introduced courses in the methodology of science and courses on the principles of scientific writing, within the framework of the newly emerging postgraduate research education in Biomedicine. At that time, he also lectured at the Institute of Information Studies and Librarianship at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University and was very committed to organising the INFOMEDIA, later renamed INFORUM, conferences at which he also lectured. The study of science led Professor Špála to the founder of this field, Eugene Garfield, whom he hosted during the latter's stay in Prague.

On the contribution of Professor Špála to the field of information science and bringing it into existence in the Czech Republic, I must add my own experience which is surely not unique. I was fortunate enough that Professor Špála took every opportunity to let me know about various innovations – I remember well how at the corner of Kateřinská and Viničná streets he excitedly explained the benefits of the newly available Web of Science. These were genuinely stimulating meetings. While monitoring his information sources Professor Špála would select innovations, important information and articles, which he kindly sent to me and other colleagues (on paper, before the development of e-mail). An enthusiasm for the dissemination of knowledge was in Professor Špála's very nature.

Editorial work was another of Professor Špála's important professional activities. From 1965 to 1975, he was the secretary of the Editorial Board of *Sborník lékařský*, and from 1976 to 2003 the secretary of the Editorial Board of *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Medica*, where a number of high-quality monographs came out thanks to his efforts. In the 1990s he co-founded the *Medical Science Monitor*, and in 1993–1999 he was a member of its international editorial board. In 1991 he became the Editor-in-Chief of *Sborník lékařský*, a major Czech medical journal, which had ceased to come out in 1990, following the death of its previous editor-in-chief, and had almost ceased to exist. Professor Špála helped to resuscitate the journal and managed it until 2003, when the journal changed its title to *Prague Medical Report*.

Professor Milan Špála, MD., PhD. was born on 20 November 1930. As early as at his studies in the 1955/1956 academic year he worked as an assistant at the Institute of Pathological Physiology of the Faculty of Pediatrics, Charles University. He graduated “sub auspiciis” in 1956 at the Faculty of General Medicine, Charles University in Prague, and became full-time research assistant to Professor Hepner at the Institute of General and Experimental Pathology, Faculty of General Medicine, Charles University (now the Institute of Pathological Physiology, First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University), where he was appointed Assistant Professor in 1961. Professor Špála worked for more than 50 years at the Institute of Pathological Physiology, First Faculty of Medicine, and many faculty graduates remember him as an excellent teacher. He defended his PhD dissertation thesis in 1963.

From 1970 to 1974, he served as head of the Department of Physiology at the University of Oran, Algeria (Département de Physiologie, Institut des Sciences Médicales, Université d'Oran), which he himself later regarded as an important and positive stage in his life. From 1978 to 1996 he was a representative for teaching at the Department of Pathological Physiology of the First Faculty of Medicine and in 1989 he was habilitated in pathological physiology at Charles University in Prague.

From 1991 to 1993 he was a member of the Scientific Council of the First Faculty of Medicine and from 1996 to 1998 a member of its Academic Senate. In 1998, on the occasion of the 650th anniversary of the founding of Charles University, Professor Špála was awarded the Commemorative Medal of Charles University and the First Faculty of Medicine, and in 2003 for his work on *Sborník lékařský*, the Commemorative Certificate of the First Faculty of Medicine of Charles University.

Professor Špála was a member of the Physiological Society of the Czech Medical Society and the Czech Society for Medical Informatics and Scientific Information of the Czech Medical Society, where he worked from 2000 to 2006 as a member of the Board. In 1990 he was appointed Honorary Member of the Society for Pathological and Clinical Physiology of the Czech Medical Society and in 2006 was an Honorary Member of the Czech Society for Medical Informatics and Scientific Information.

I want this reminiscence of Professor Milan Špála, MD., PhD., Emeritus Chief Editor of this journal, to be optimistic in tone. Professor Špála taught us much while we peered out from the isolationism of the previous regime, he helped establish various kinds of support for scientific work at Charles University and thus his activities in university and professional societies will continue to contribute to scientific and academic life even though Professor Špála is no longer among us.

We honour his memory!

Prof. Karel Šonka, MD., DSc.

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