

In memoriam...

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Professor Dan Gavrilu (1913-2012)

On Nov. 4 2012, Professor Dan Gavrilu died at the University Hospital in Bucharest following an ischemic brain stroke. The unit doctors tried their best to save him, but without any result in spite of the patient's robust body, educated through sports. He was a dedicated tennis player until old age. I could see him quite often carrying a tennis racket in a shoulder bag on the way from the Herastrau tennis court to his home, always covering the distance by foot.

He left behind a grieving wife, Mihaela, a general practitioner who had been sharing with him with devotion the best 34 years of her life.

I was stunned by the news, as not only did I understand him as a surgeon, but felt nothing but appreciation for him in all his instances: in the operating theatre, as a practicing surgeon, in the amphitheatre, teaching us Pathology and drawing on the blackboard, presenting films at the Surgery Society reunions, as his entire activity brought him worldwide recognition due to his studies on the esophagus.

I had the honour to be taught by Dan Gavrilu in my 3rd year of studies at the "Carol Davila" Medical School in Bucharest in 1956-1957, the Head of Department at that time being Ph. D. Ion Făgărășanu (1900-1987). The master was also the tutor of Group 35, which included me, and I received a "very good" mark from him at the end of the study year.

But my greatest satisfaction was that I was allowed to work at the Surgery Clinic of Colentina hospital, led by Dr. Ion Porumbaru (1908-1983), an almost perfect technician and a

clinician, formerly the closest disciple of Professor Iacob Iacobovici (1879-1959), a great surgeon, head of school at the Brîncoveanu Settlements.

Although my group were studying either at "Colentina Hospital" or at "Saint Mary's" (called "Vasile Roaită" at that time), I was working in the operating room or at the head of patients, as there was no ICU in those days.

While I was a probationer on the Infant Orthopedic and Surgical Ward of "Grigore Alexandrescu" Hospital, in 1959, I attended the esophagus plastic surgery Dan Gavrilu performed on the child Hinci, assisted by lecturer Dumitru Verceanu.

In 1968, as a secondary surgeon at Suceava Hospital Surgical Unit, headed by Dr. Vasile Andriu (1917-2003), I was a member of the team led by Dr. Mircea Postecă (1923-1993) which practised esophagus plastic surgery according to the Dan Gavrilu method, this being the 2nd operation of this kind performed in Moldova, as the first one had been led by Dr. Irofte Eminescu (born 1902) in Galați. The team's head went to Bucharest for a month to study the technique and the instruments required by the operation at "Carol Davila" hospital. The difficulty in applying the "T" stitches and the sutures required by the great gastric curvature are a known fact.

Dan Gavrilu was born in Brăila, on April 26th 1915, graduated from "I.C. Brătianu" Highschool in Pitești and Medical School in Bucharest, where he was distinguished with "Magna cum Laude". In 1943, he wins the contest for the position of secondary surgeon to Prof. Amza Jianu (1881-1962), gets specialized in Viena, Ulm and Munchen, passes his specialist surgeon exam in 1945, and becomes a primary surgeon in 1947.

After being an assistant professor in 1944, he becomes famous for his esophagus plastic surgery with gastric tube of the great curvature, after splenectomy and pancreas verticalization. He performed his first operation of this type in 1951, after 25

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procedures exercised on corpses. The procedure was performed at the "Floreasca" Emergency Hospital in Bucharest, and was published in Medical Sciences Review No. 6/June, 1951.

He becomes a lecturer in 1953, associate by contest in 1968, Ph. D. lecturer in 1971 and professor in 1973.

Beginning with 1963, he was invited to and took part in about 30 congresses, conferences, sessions and speciality demonstrations in Moscow, Paris, Vienna, Prague, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, San Remo, Trieste, Hamburg, San Francisco, New York, Jerusalem, Sao Paulo, Bahia Blanca, Rome, Madrid, Toronto, Davos, Leeds, Tokyo. In 1975, as a "visiting professor", he operated in 4 American states: New York, Minnesota, California and Pennsylvania.

In 1976 he was nominated as No. 1 in the World Surgeons Directory and, in 1983, was declared in Hamburg an "emeritas member" of the Surgeons' International Society.

Professors from all over the world (Noel Maillard – Paris, Puig la Galle – Barcelona, H. Elis – London, Ev. Uglov – Sankt Petersburg, H. I. Heimlich – Chicago, Rene Mageward – Geneve, Carlos Repetto – Buenos Aires etc) came to Bucharest Clinic to watch Dan Gavrilu operating, and were extremely satisfied with what they saw.

He was present with chapters in 9 great Surgery treaties, as well as in "L'Enciclopedie medico-chirurgicale" of Paris:

1. "The Craft of Surgery", 1st edition 1964, Philip Cooper, New York, 2nd edition 1971 (vol I, p 454);
2. "Nouveau traite de tehniqe chirurgicale", Devin, Lataste, Maillet, Ed. Masson et Cie, Paris, 1968, T10, p 113;
3. "Chirurgia delli stenosi cicatriziali dell' esofago", Gianfranco Fegiz, Luigi Gioffre, Picin Editore, Padova, 1971, p 253;
4. "Tratato di tecnica chirurgica", vol. V/1, padova. 1971, p 253;
5. "Surgery of the Esophagus", Ed. Livingstone – Churchill, New York, Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, 1988;
6. "Colour Atlas of Gastrointestinal Surgery", C. Cardiano, G. I. Nardi, Picci Ed. Padova, 1989;

7. "Surgery of the Upper Gastrointestinal tract", G.G. Jemieson, H.T. Debas, Ed. Capman and Hall Medicall, New York, London, Glasgow, 1994;

8. "Atlas Grudnoi Hirurghii" (pad redactiim B.V. Petrovskovo), Moscova, Leningrad, 1974;

9. "Cancers de l'oesophage et du cardia", Ed. Elipses, Paris, 1995.

Besides the esophagus plastic surgery technique bearing his name (producing also a 2nd variety of the surgery, including the pylorus in the construction of the new esophagus) he imagined the gastrostomy with peritoneal collar, the vagotomy with pylorus plastic surgery in ulcer, the technique of restoring defecation and continence sensation after rectal resection, a procedure eliminating loop syndrome associated with the surgical treatment of duodenal ulcer with difficult duodenal blunt.

In over 40 years he operated on more than 5.700 patients with esophagus problems. There were over 40.000 other surgeries. He was author or partner in 7 documentaries on medical subjects.

Regarding his private life, his father died in 1942 after a skull base fracture, so he will take care of his mother until her death in 1980. He used to say that it was his father to whom he owes his "physical condition, firmness, determination and strictness". From him he learned how to count only on his own strength, as people are false and take advantage of others. His wife, Mihaela, was close to him until his last breath. She buried him discreetly at Bellu cemetery, after a brief wake in the small church of the Medical School "Carol Davila", with no official ceremony by the authorities.

In the "Surgery" magazine No. 3/2012, p. 417-420, in the Anniversaries section, I published the article "Ph. D. Lecturer Dan Gavrilu, Romanian Surgeons' Dean of Age, at 97", wishing him "health and hope of reaching the age of 100", which will no longer be possible, as he has left this world earlier.

His memory will always be alive in his students' minds as well as in foreign surgeons' memories, who appreciated him more and practice his technique.

May God rest his soul!

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