

IN MEMORIAM

Anna Jagoda Podhajska (1938 – 2006)

The fields of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology have lost the World-famous Polish microbiologist, Professor Anna Jagoda Podhajska. She was the Founder and former Associate Dean of the Intercollegiate Faculty of Biotechnology at the University of Gdańsk and Medical University of Gdańsk and also the Chair of the Department of Biotechnology within this Faculty. She was 68 years old and fell victim to a brain cancer.

Anna Podhajska was born on 17 April 1938 in Gdynia and her childhood coincided with the horrors of Nazi occupation of Poland (including a Concentration Camp). She graduated from the Medical University of Gdańsk in 1964 and received there her Ph.D. in microbiology in 1968. This was followed by a habilitation in 1987, based on her work on class IIS restriction endonucleases.

From 1969 Anna Podhajska was working with Professor Karol Taylor (Gene, 223 (1998) 393–394) at Department of Biochemistry at the University of Gdańsk, and then organized and chaired Department of Microbiology at the same School. For 3 years starting in 1981 and then for several months each year she spend about 10 years at Waław Szybalski laboratory at the MaArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Among her major discoveries, Anna described the universal restriction endonucleases able to cleave DNA at any predetermined site. These were constructed of an oligo-adapters and class-IIS restriction enzymes. This work was done in the Waław Szybalski laboratory at the University Wisconsin-Madison. Her work was published in *Science* (1988, 240:504–506) and *Methods in Enzymology* (1992, 216:303–309) and then was selected to be cited or reprinted in several books and scientific journals.

After her return to Gdańsk, in 1992 and inspired by the Madison experience, Anna began to plan and organize the Intercollegiate Faculty of Biotechnology University of Gdańsk and Medical University of Gdańsk, and became its first Associate Dean from 1993 until 1997.

Her more recent research was concentrated on several topics: (1) Development and implementation of molecular diagnostics of human viral diseases (hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), cytomegalovirus human papillomavirus), (2) Emerging variants of hepatitis B virus: new tools epidemiological survey, diagnosis of infection, and monitoring of drug resistance, (3) Molecular diagnostics of cancer diseases (breast cancer and cervical cancer), (4) Molecular studies on new photosensitizers as applied to photodynamic method of cancer diagnostics and treatment, (5) Application of new molecular markers to study the diversity of cyanobacteria and identification of toxic strains of cyanobacteria, (6) Human and bacterial gene cloning and protein purification for scientific and commercial application

Anna was elected as a member of The Committee of Biotechnology and The Committee of Microbiology, Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). She was also a member of several Scientific Boards, including those of The Institute of Marine and Tropical Medicine in Gdynia, The Institute of Sera and Vaccines in Warsaw, The Centre for Microbiology and Virology PAN in Łódź, PAN Library in Gdańsk and of The Editorial



Boards of several scientific journals (*Gene*, *Polish Journal of Microbiology*, *Polish Journal of Cosmetology*). She was elected by the assembly of the Scandinavian and Baltic Universities, Clinics and Companies as a Vice-President of ScanBalt association in 2002 (Borderless Biotech: Europe's First Meta-Region Taking Shape, *Euro Biotech News* 2003, 3:22–25).

Anna was a very kind woman, always ready to help, true academic teacher with an outstanding sense of humor. She was an excellent experimenter, teacher and also proficient organizer who built modern Intercollegiate Faculty of Biotechnology. Moreover, she has initiated The Biotechnology Summer School, organized by Faculty every year since 1994.

Anna was a worldwide-known Polish scientist, in the fields of restriction endonucleases and later in molecular diagnostics and epidemiology of hepatitis virus B and C, and in Poland, in establishing biotechnology at both University of Gdańsk and Medical University of Gdańsk and training a new generation of Polish molecular biologists. She was also an excellent organizer of technology transfer from the university laboratory to the biotechnological companies. She had planned and established Center of Technology Transfer in Gdańsk and initiated the Pomeranian Science and Technology Park in Gdynia.

Anna was also one of initiators and Chair of the Jury (from 2001 to 2006) of the Polish edition of the L'Oreal and UNESCO award "For Women in Science" known as "L'OREAL Polska dla Kobiet i Nauki".

Anna Podhajska and her genius are irreplaceable. She was an exceptional person and her educational skills, organizational energy, and recently, her participation in establishment of the Scandinavian and Baltic country network (ScanBalt) will be always missed very much.

Ewa Łojkowska