

ORIGINAL PAPER

# Dr. Kazimierz Grzebień – Wiktor Dega's Poznań school of orthopedic in Toruń

Dr Kazimierz Grzebień – poznańska szkoła ortopedyczna Wiktora Degi w Toruniu

Maciej Jackowiak

Oddział Ortopedyczno-Urazowy i Onkologii Narządu Ruchu, Wojewódzki Szpital Zespolony im. L. Rydygiera w Toruniu, Poland

## Abstract

Dr Kazimierz Grzebień was born in November 26, 1928 in Kościerzyna. He received his medical degree at the Faculty of Medicine at the Medical Academy of Poznań on November 11, 1953 and started to work at the Orthopedic Clinic in Poznań, headed by prof. Wiktor Dega. He worked at the clinic until October 30, 1971. From April, 1972 to November 30, 1994, he was the Head of the Orthopedic and Trauma Department at the Provincial Hospital in Toruń. On every occasion he made note of the brilliant and innovative method of treatments and rehabilitation applied by Prof. Wiktor Dega. He died on December 14, 2003, on the day of the opening of the symposium in Warsaw celebrating the 75th anniversary of Polish orthopedics, of which he was a great luminary.

**Key words:** Kazimierz Grzebień, Wiktor Dega

## Streszczenie

Dr Kazimierz Grzebień urodził się 26 listopada 1928 roku w Kościerzynie. Dyplom lekarza uzyskał w dniu 11 listopada 1953 roku na Wydziale Lekarskim Akademii Medycznej w Poznaniu i podjął pracę w Klinice Ortopedii w Poznaniu, kierowanej przez prof. Wiktora Degę. W Klinice pracował do 30 października 1971 roku. Od kwietnia 1972 roku do 30 listopada 1994 roku był Ordynatorem Oddziału Ortopedyczno-Urazowego Wojewódzkiego Szpitala Zespolonego w Toruniu. Przy każdej okazji wspominał genialne i nowatorskie metody leczenia i rehabilitacji stosowane przez Profesora Wiktora Degę. Zmarł 14 grudnia 2003 roku, w dniu rozpoczęcia w Warszawie uroczystego sympozjum z okazji 75-lecia polskiej ortopedii, której był wielkim luminarzem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kazimierz Grzebień, Wiktor Dega

**Author's address:** Maciej Jackowiak, Oddział Ortopedyczno-Urazowy i Onkologii Narządu Ruchu, Wojewódzki Szpital Zespolony im. L. Rydygiera, ul Św. Józefa 57-59, 87-100 Toruń, Poland; phone: +48 601653676 ; e-mail: m.jackowiak@novamed.torun.pl

Received: **27.08.2021**  
Accepted: **02.09.2021**  
Published: **30.09.2021**



He was born on November 26, 1928 in Kościerzyna into a family of teachers.

During World War II, having had participated in classes conducted as part of the underground education system he took his final secondary school examinations in 1948 at Lyceum in Nowe Miasto Lubawskie and after passing them he started studies at the Faculty of Medicine at the Medical Academy in Poznań.

He received his medical degree on November 11, 1953 and started to work at the Orthopedic Clinic in Poznań, headed by prof. Wiktor Dega, a world-renowned physician and scientist, founder of Polish rehabilitation and pediatric orthopedics. He initially worked as a volunteer, then 5 years as a scholarship holder, and then as an assistant and senior assistant (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Department of Orthopedics in Poznań in the 1960s (Dr Kazimierz Grzebień is standing in the middle)

In 1956, for 8 months, he ran a ward in the Orthopedic and Rehabilitation Sanatorium in Świebodzin which was organizationally linked to the Poznań clinic. He worked at the Clinic until October 30, 1971.

During his work in the Poznań Clinic, Dr. Grzebień systematically raised his professional qualifications, obtaining the title of orthopedic specialist in 1958, and later thanks to his scientific work under the supervision of prof. Wiktor Dega, in 1966 he obtained his PhD in medicine based on the dissertation titled "Physical properties of the fibrous cap and the examination of its usefulness in reconstructing the articular surface of the acetabulum in rabbit hip arthroplasty". Today it can be clearly stated that this research laid the foundations for the development of joint endoprosthesis, a treatment method so popular today and without which it is difficult to imagine modern orthopedics (Fig. 2).

When he entered the competition for the post of the head of the Orthopedic Department of the Municipal Hospital in Toruń, in September 1971, he received a very favorable opinion from the then Director of the Orthopedic Institute of the



Fig. 2. Presentation of the diploma of doctor of medical sciences by prof. Wiktor Dega

Medical Academy in Poznań - prof. Alfons Senger and Dr. Witold Jeske, a Poznań-based specialist in orthopedics. Both men spoke very highly of the professional and organizational skills as well as the ethical attitudes towards the physician's work.

From April 1972 to 30 November 1994, he was the Head of the Orthopedic and Trauma Department at the Provincial Hospital in Toruń (the hospital's name was changed due to the administrative reform of the country at that time, when the Toruń province was established). Dr. Grzebień also served as a provincial specialist in orthopedics for many years. On every occasion he made note of the brilliant and innovative methods of treatment and rehabilitation applied by Professor Wiktor Dega, who was an unquestionable authority in Poland and the face of Polish orthopedics abroad.

When he was heading the department, he trained more than a dozen orthopedics specialists, and 2 doctors working in the department earned 2 their PhDs in medical sciences. He was a demanding yet understanding teacher. In his daily work he applied the knowledge of anatomy and biomechanics of the locomotor system while assisting in surgical procedures and examining patients. He mastered this knowledge which was essential for proper orthopedic treatment planning and management. He passed on the secrets of diagnosing and treating congenital diseases, in particular hip dislocation and clubfoot, which he was passionate about and which he had been learning to treat during his work in Poznań. In the 1970s and 1980s, before the introduction of the Graf method of ultrasound examination, or early developmental diagnosis of hip dysplasia, hip disorders in children were rampant. Extensive surgery or prolonged in-patient traction treatment in young children were applied on a daily basis. At that time, children treated in the department often made up half of the patients. Legendary are the stories of parents' attempts and tricks to see their hospitalized children despite a ban – from above – on visits. The possibility to treat children's orthope-

dic disorders was considered a great success in Toruń, and Dr. Grzebień's fame spread far and wide, as evidenced by the many places where his patients resided. Despite his great knowledge and experience, he remained a humble student of the great Master – Professor Dega and consulted the most difficult cases in Poznań. This was evidenced by the Professor's handwritten consultation notes included in the hospital records of young patients.

Dr. Grzebień was also an expert in the treatment of neuro-orthopedic disorders that required particularly broad interdisciplinary knowledge and a precise understanding of biomechanics. In those days, children with cerebral palsy or congenital myelomeningocele of the lumbar spine were quite a burden for their parents, but also a nightmare for the health care providers. In the department run by Dr. Grzebień, they were treated at the highest level.

During all procedures, he taught elegance and atraumatic surgical technique, which – for some – was an unnecessary celebration, but the payoff was uncomplicated healing and better long-term functional outcome. With his demeanor he set an example of attitude towards patients and colleagues. He taught patience and respect towards patients, he taught how to listen to their complaints, explain their doubts and give them hope, often during a very long treatment process. In his daily practice, he always reminded everyone of teamwork, so crucial in orthopedics. He set an example of how to show respect to all team members, regardless of their education or position. While he demanded commitment and reliability from others, he was most demanding towards himself.

One of the important episodes in his professional career was the rescue operation during the biggest train crash in the post-war Poland which happened in Ołtoczyn near Toruń at 4.30 am on August 19, 1980. The collision between a passenger train and a freight train killed 67 people and injured 64. The rescue operation was led by the provincial fire chief in Toruń. Assistance was provided not only by doctors and delegated officers, but also by civilians who immediately rushed to the scene of the crash. Additionally, doctors were also on site. Dr. Kazimierz Grzebień, along with surgeons and orthopedists from the Provincial Hospital in Toruń, rushed to the scene of the accident. Interdisciplinary teams were organized at nearby hospitals and ambulances were called. Ambulances with resuscitation equipment began to arrive on the scene, but unfortunately, their equipment was insufficient for this kind of crash. The situation was similar for firefighters, they did not have sufficient resources such as gloves or stretchers – they carried the bodies with their bare hands, no one paid attention to whether they could cut themselves or get infected (contact with blood), all that mattered was the fastest and most effective help. Professor Waldemar Jędrzejczyk (Head of the Department of Surgery at the Provincial Hospital in Toruń at the time) wrote years later in "Gazeta Lekarska" [Physician's Gazette]: "The crash site was a place of great hu-

*man drama. Dozens of dying passengers could not be helped. The most tragic cases were those where the injured person's limb got stuck and was crushed as a result. The only thing that could have saved those poor souls would have been an immediate amputation on site, but that was out of the question."*

At every step of his career, Dr. Grzebień stressed the need for learning and was open to any imported therapeutic and diagnostic news. Thanks to his support, on August 10, 1993 the first – in the then Toruń Province – total hip replacement was performed at the department, a procedure which in those days was only carried out in orthopedic clinics. The introduction of this procedure was also possible thanks to the direct involvement of the Head of the Orthopedic Department of the Medical Academy in Gdańsk, Professor Józef Szczekot.

After his retirement in 1994 Dr. Kazimierz Grzebień did not stop taking interest in the problems of orthopedics in Toruń and always cared about the results of work and image of the department. He never refused a consultation or support in preparing scientific speeches or publications (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Farewell at the Provincial Hospital in Toruń before retirement - November 1994

Due to a serious illness, he had been battling for several years, he was unable to fully celebrate two wonderful anniversaries – his 75th birthday and 50th anniversary of receiving his medical degree, both held in 2003.

Maciej Jackowiak et al.: Dr. Kazimierz Grzebień – Wiktor Dega's Poznań school of orthopedic in Toruń

He died in a hospital in Bielany on December 14, 2003, on the day of the opening of the symposium in Warsaw celebrating the 75th anniversary of Polish orthopedics, of which he was a great luminary.

## References

1. Badurek S. (red.): „40-lecie Wojewódzkiego Szpitala Zespolonego im. Ludwika Rydygiera w Toruniu” Album Jubileuszowy, Toruń 2021: 87-93.
2. Bieganowski L., Jędrzejczyk W. (red.): „Zasłużeni lekarze toruńscy we wspomnieniach” Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2016: 219-222.
3. Gazeta Pomorska 19 sierpnia 2019 r.
4. Gazeta Wyborcza 19 sierpnia 2021 r.
5. Łysiak M.: „Chirurgia toruńska w zarysie”. Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu, Toruń 2006: 99-103.
6. Nowakowski A. (red.): „100 lat Ortopedii Polskiej 1913-2013”. Wydawnictwo Exemplum, Poznań 2013: 361-366.

