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Homage to a good man.
Dr. Szabó Ioan † (1955-2023)

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"Medicine is science and conscience warmed by love for human beings"- this motto of Iuliu Hațieganu, the founding father of our Medical School in Cluj-Napoca, burns like the Olympic flame from one generation of alumni to another. Like any flame, it is still vulnerable to currents and winds such as political ambitions, professional competition, over-specialization or cultural ignorance.



Thus, to evoke the memory of someone like Dr. Szabó Ioan, who literally enacted this principle as his way of living, is not just an occasion of kind remembrance for the ones who knew him, but a source of inspiration for the ones who did not, a way to keep the flame alive.

Dr. Szabó Ioan was a neurosurgeon who specialized in orbital and periorbital surgery and worked at the Neurosurgery Clinic of the Cluj

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County Emergence Hospital. He was not an academic, so he was never a celebrity, but his patients, residents and students admired him for his expertise, honesty, kindness and generosity. I got to know him after my first year of medical school when I did summer practice in the Neurosurgery Clinic and entered by chance in his operating room.

He immediately acknowledged my presence, asked me some anatomy questions and as I answered correctly, he told me to come closer to the wound and explained the procedure. From then on I followed him in the clinic as much as possible, we did some research together and had fascinating discussions about anatomy and philosophy. I regarded him as my mentor in medicine and life. Now at his too-early passing, I would like to sketch his portrait from three perspectives:

SCIENCE

Dr. Szabó was an erudite. No one could compete with his knowledge of anatomy, surgery, pathology and general culture. Firstly, was a hard-working student, graduating from the prestigious „Mihai Viteazul” high school in Turda and the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca with maximal grades. Secondly, as a neurosurgeon he did his PhD in orbital surgery and developed this field which was unknown in our country, performing over 2000 orbital surgeries with innovative surgical approaches and orbit reconstruction techniques. In collaboration with his wife, anatomy teacher and neuro-ophthalmologist Dr. Bianca Szabó, he wrote several highly regarded monographs on the subject and published numerous research papers in international journals.

CONSCIENCE

The professional conduct of Dr. Szabó was irreproachable. The daily good deed was his constant goal. All his colleagues respected him for his fairness and generosity. For residents and students, he was like a parent, concerned for their progress, and always with a good advice at the right moment. Above all, Dr. Szabó cared for his patients sincerely

and deeply. He regarded them first as persons and then as surgical cases. I remember seeing him sometimes wiping his tears after describing the medical history of his patients. He always made time to explain to his patients where the pathology was and what was happening. He never left the clinic without making a last visit to the patient rooms.

LOVE FOR HUMAN BEINGS

Everybody who interacted with Dr. Szabó -from friends, patients and students, to doctors and nurses- remembers his way of speaking and listening which made the interlocutor feel like the most important person in the world. This quality came not just out of politeness, but from a deep love for human beings, rooted in his spiritual richness. Having a solid general knowledge and a genuine preoccupation with culture and civilization, Dr. Szabó traveled all around the world, not as a tourist but as an explorer. He liked to interact with locals from different cultures to understand their concerns and beliefs. From his long and thoroughly planned journeys, he collected numerous spiritual objects, mostly masks and representations of the human face. As an orbital surgeon concerned with facial reconstruction, he had a passion for the human face as a mirror of the spirit. Philosophically he had a profound understanding of the human being which was reflected in his medical conduct. His patients loved him. Many of them came at annual follow-ups for decades just to thank him and gladly let him know they felt well. As an ophthalmologist, I spend a lot of time looking at the patient's eyes but thinking of him I try to make time to also look in their eyes for a moment.

In Dr. Szabó, all three components of good medicine proposed by Iuliu Hațieganu blended harmoniously. He was an authentic and profound thinker and at the same time a joyful man. I will remember him with the mustache arched in a wise and kind smile. He was a wonderful doctor and a good man. May his example ignite the flame in many generations to come.