

Gratiarum actio

Your Magnificence Rector of the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Dear Professor Pella - Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Members of the High Senate, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is indeed an enormous honour for me to achieve today the title of *doctor honoris causa* of your University. For me it is also a great responsibility and obligation for further hard work in order to promote science, mainly the one I represent preventive cardiology and lipidology, in Poland, Central and Eastern Europe, Europe and worldwide. In my short lecture I would like to focus on few things, very important for me, to finally confirm that everyone can gain a success, in every place in the world, but there are few simple conditions - we need to be ambitious, operative, always looking for solutions, and always rising questions. Nowadays I often say to my mentees, associates and colleagues two important statements that have accompanied me in my whole professional life: *"if you do not try you will never have"* and *"you might fail, but if you have tried your best, you will finally win – it is only a matter of time"*.

First I would like focus for a while on the issue of a mentorship. I have never had a real mentor. Fortunately, not being afraid of asking questions, I met great people on my professional road, including among others Prof. Dimitri P. Mikhailidis from University College of London, with whom I have been already collaborating for last 15 years, and Prof. Marian Zembala, outstanding cardiac surgeon, previous Ministry of Health of Poland, who both showed me that if you work very hard, leave your failures behind you, and especially if you can learn from your failures, everything is indeed possible. They are examples of great mentors that I wish everyone. Why it is so important to be a mentor? Because you might create a group of people who will be very much dedicated to your joint work, because you might help your younger colleagues to avoid mistakes you experienced, you might also show them the best way for their scientific and professional development, finally you might learn from them as much as they learn from you. Please notice; we live in the era of internet, social medias, artificial intelligence, machine learning, deep learning, business intelligence, etc. Are you really sure you know more about this than your students that have used these tools almost since the birth? What about tele-medicine, medical gaming, methods of gamification? Only together, joining inter- generation forces, you and your team might gain a great success! It is the reason you need to try to be the best mentor, but please remember if you would like to be a good mentor you must also learn to be mentee from time to time. Why I have started with the mentorship issue from the very beginning? Because in fact there is no tradition of mentorship in Poland and many European, mainly Central and Eastern European countries. Why? Because there was always a kind of stupid fear, that our younger associate might replace me on the position of the head of department, division, will be better practitioner, will have more patients, better papers and grants, etc. Therefore we usually surround with much weaker people, because we are afraid of those who are or might be better than we are! And that is why the universities from this part of the world are very low in the worldwide rankings. If you see that someone around you is better than you, try to professionally match him, learn from him, collaborate with him, but do not afraid of him, and do not try to limit him taking into account the fact you have better position. Only when you are working with the real leaders, you will be also a leader, and in the consequence if you are working with the average people, you will be a 'leader' in your own department only.

Equally important issue, in fact strictly linked to mentorship, is effective collaboration. From my point of view collaboration is a key to success, key to develop ourselves, key to effectively realize our ideas. From the very beginning I had a very wide scientific and professional collaboration. Now, after many years, my colleagues often ask me, how it is possible that you are well-recognized everywhere in the world, from US, Canada through France, UK, Bulgaria, Norway, to Estonia, Uzbekistan, Taiwan to Japan. In fact, I do not know the real answer for this question, as it is so normal for me to collaborate with everyone, to gather people around you, to look for people for collaboration at all new projects. I remember when I tried to apply for my first grant at Polish National Centre for Science, and was not able to find an expert in Poland to help me with the preparation of methodology; thus I wrote about 100 e-mails to experts I simply found in Medline, whom I knew only from scientific papers, people highly recognized internationally. Why 100 e-mails – because I simply wanted to have answer from at least one of them to support me, and I was so surprised seeing response from almost 30 of them! With most of them we have still had very strong collaboration, with a few of them we are great friends. So don't be ever afraid of asking, most of the people are very open to support you! It is also the mentality that needs to be changed in our countries! We need to be much more opened for the collaboration, because if you would like to make research in your department only - you are doomed to failure! Only joint ideas, multicentre projects give you the pleasure

of scientific work with the outcomes that are sometimes difficult to predict, obviously from the positive point of view. Taking into account the place where I have just achieved this wonderful honor – *doctorate honoris causa*, I also checked when I started my collaboration, and I am sure I can say friendship, with Professor Pella, with Daniel. It was 24th August 2013, when I wrote e-mail to him suggesting a wide scientific and educational collaboration between Polish Lipid Association, I founded two years earlier, *nota bene* within the collaboration with US National Lipid Association, and Slovak Association of Atherosclerosis. He responded after few hours! And since that time we have had very fruitful collaboration, and what is equally important we know we might always count on ourselves.

So – remember – multi-department, multi-center and finally international collaboration is a clue for success in every area! Finally, I would like to convince you that if you would like to gain a success, you need to be simply brave! What is the definition of courage in our professional life? It is an ability to make difficult decisions and solve problems, it is an ability to take even (almost) impossible tasks, it is an ability to change the place of your work in order to further develop yourself, it is an ability to sometimes *go against the wind*. That is why, based on my best knowledge, I was the youngest associate professor at the age of 30 and full professor at the age of 36 in medicine in Poland, the youngest Undersecretary of the State in Polish Government working in the Ministry of Science and Higher Education at the age of 33, that is why I founded Polish Lipid Association (PoLA) in 2011, now with almost 500 members, and next the Lipid and Blood Pressure Meta-analysis Collaboration (LBPMC) Group in 2012 - a group of over 150 worldwide experts aimed to investigate the most important issues in the field of lipid disorders, hypertension, nutrition and cardiovascular risk, and next in 2015 the International Lipid Expert Panel (ILEP), which has been founded to prepare recommendations in the area of preventive cardiology in the most debatable issues that have not been covered in the existing guidelines. I would like to emphasize that in both LBPMC Group and ILEP Prof. Daniel Pella is a steering committee member. Finally, that is why I also took up the gauntlet and in 2013 started in the competition to become a President of the 2nd largest Hospital in Poland and Research Institute - the Polish Mother's Memorial Hospital - Research Institute (PMMHRI), despite everyone said to me it was a kind of "mission impossible", and in 2017, at the Institute, I founded Think-Tank "*Innovation for Health*", which gathers six main health research institutes in Poland and over 50 largest medical business representatives in Poland with main aim to make innovations in the medical area in Poland. Already after 2 years Think-Tank is now considered as one of the most important stakeholder in the field of medicine and innovation in Poland. I am saying about this and giving these examples only to show you that you cannot be afraid to realize your professional plans and dreams. You might fail, sometimes it is necessary to wait, but if you really want, and you work hard, have a great team of engaged people, listen to your mentors and try to be the best mentor for your younger colleague, have wide collaboration, you will always succeed, it is only a matter of time.

Always believe in yourself and keep trying to realize all your plans and professional dreams! It is much better to be incorrect dreamer than ambitionally unfulfilled.

Thank you once again! It is indeed a great honour to be here.