

# SURVEILLANCE AND FUTURE OF EPIDEMIOLOGY

## SYMPOSIUM HELD IN PRAGUE NOVEMBER 11, 2009, AS A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR KAREL RAŠKA, THE OUTSTANDING EPIDEMIOLOGIST

On the 11th November, 2009 a symposium to celebrate 100th anniversary of birth of the outstanding Czech epidemiologist prof. Karel Raška (born on the 17th November 1909) was held. After graduation at the Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague and short army career he was appointed head of microbiological department of the National Health Institute in 1938. In 1952 he became a director of the Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Prague. From the beginning of his career he was devoted to the fight against prevailing communicable diseases. Noteworthy was his share on containment of louse/borne typhus outbreak in the concentration camp Terezin at the end of the second world war. In subsequent years he was at the front in formulating the concept of public health services in then Czechoslovakia and in his capacity of the leading national epidemiologist contributed to significant reduction of incidence of prevailing infectious diseases such as typhoid fever, diphtheria, pertussis, measles, hepatitis. His ability to promote, organize and mobilize interdisciplinary cooperation was crowned by successful elimination of brucellosis and bovine TB. From the national and global point of view his work and contribution to the theory and methodology of active surveillance of communicable diseases and staunch advocacy of smallpox eradication program were appreciated up most. Raška's activities at the national and international level (founding member of the International Epidemiological Association) reached a peak by his appointment as director of Communicable Disease Division at the World Health Organization (WHO) HQs in Geneva in 1963. He persuaded the Director General of the need to create separate smallpox eradication unit and was instrumental in outlining a new strategy for intensified phase of global smallpox eradication program based

on the concept of active surveillance and abandonment of mass vaccination campaign. The new strategy was accepted by WHO General Health Assembly in 1965. During the intensified phase of eradication the need of active search for infection and rapid containment of discovered focus was emphasized and resulted in hitherto unprecedented success in the history of medicine, global eradication of smallpox, highlighted by discovery of the last case of smallpox in Somalia in 1977. Achievement of the global smallpox eradication was later confirmed by the panel of experts and declared at the WHO General Health Assembly in May, 1980. In recognition of professor Raška's share on smallpox eradication British Medical Royal Society awarded him Jenner's medal in 1984.

The symposium was organized by the First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague and the Czech Society of Epidemiology and Microbiology of the Czech Medical Association in collaboration with National Institute of Public Health and the Third Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague and was supported by a kind sponsorship of the GlaxoSmithKline, FEI Europe, Elin, Olympus and Mikro companies.

Our Journal brings the articles of two speakers describing the most salient periods and great work of professor Raška. The editorial board of CEJPH wishes to pay the tributes to founder and long time editor in chief of the Journal of Hygiene, Epidemiology, Microbiology and Immunology, the predecessor of CEJPH which continued to be published for 36 years and in which tradition our Journal wishes to continue.

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