

## THREE QUARTERS OF CENTURY AND GOING STRONG: CELEBRATING PROFESSOR DR. VONKA'S PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Professor Vladimir Vonka one of the top and most distinguished virologists of his country was born in 1930. This was the year of the beginning and spread of economic slump across Europe which was followed by historical geopolitical and revolutionary changes lasting over 60 years. Such atmospheres influenced his professional development. Dr. Vonka graduated in 1955 from the Medical Faculty of Charles University in Prague and he was assigned for internship in medicine to one of the regional hospitals although his early dreams were studies of agents of infectious diseases preferentially of viruses. A year later he was accepted in the Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Prague and assigned to the Department of Virology. The task of this department was the development of new diagnostic methods and studies of viral infectious diseases in cooperation with the Department of Infectious Diseases of the medical school. Salk's discovery of the inactivated poliovaccine initiated a nationwide research program of prevention of polio and the department became the essential part of this effort. Dr. Vonka, in a short time, became one of the principal investigators of particular projects. In the newly established Research Institute of Immunology in Prague in 1961, Dr. Vonka was appointed as head of the Department of Biology of Viruses and continued his chairmanship when the department was renamed with an extended program to Department of Experimental Virology. Changes in reorganization of research institutes in the country led to transfer of Dr. Vonka and his team of coworkers to the Institute of Hematology and Blood Transfusion in Prague where the Department of Experimental Virology has been involved in most recent worldwide pursued research projects.

Important periods of Dr. Vonka's professional development embrace his experience as a WHO senior research fellow in the Department of Virology and Epidemiology of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, chaired by Joseph Melnick in 1964–65 and by invitation as a visiting professor in the same department in 1968–69. Important was also his stay as visiting professor in the Department of Microbiology of the Pennsylvania State University in Hershey in 1983–84. Under the prevailing political conditions of the time, it took several years to get permission to defend his thesis for Doctor of Science awarded to him in 1981. After revolutionary changes in the country Dr. Vonka was appointed as professor of the 2. Medical Faculty of Charles University in Prague.

Dr. Vonka started his carrier in virology just at the time when virology developed to an independent scientific field. His first studies were related to diagnostic methods and their applications in polio research as well as to genetics of polioviruses. Another scope was associated with herpesviruses. Dr. Vonka studied the immunology and molecular biology of EBV and its association with carcinoma of tonsils and of supraglottic cancer of the larynx. Of major interest were cellular aspects of herpes simplex virus infection, type specific antibodies and development of a subunit vaccine. Dr. Vonka's most important study in this field was the prospective study of the association of HSV2 infection with cervical cancer. This study of over 10 thousand women exceeded with its complexity all similar studies abroad and did not find evidence for the pathogenetic role of HSV2 in the development of neoplasia of the uterine cervix. Further studies involved the role of papillomaviruses in cervical neoplasia. Antibodies to various antigens of HPV were studied in different populations in studies organized by WHO. Studies of vaccinia virus and its recombinants for potential use for vaccines is one of the fields of his interest, as are problems of gene therapy and of antitumor vaccines. Causality in medicine, especially related to viruses and tumors is one of his theoretical interests.

The results of Dr. Vonka's research activities are presented in over 250 publications in various respected professional journals.

Dr. Vonka is a member of the Learned Society of the Czech Republic and member of different professional associations emphasizing his election as member of the American Academy of Microbiology and of Academia Scientiarum et Artium Europea. He was honored with several awards such as the G. Mendel medal as well as the medal of the 650 year anniversary of the Charles University.

It is my privilege to have several decades lasting friendship with Dr Vonka. *Ad multos annos.*

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