

# Women in Polish otorhinolaryngology

## Kobiety w otorynolaryngologii polskiej

Antoni Bruzgielewicz<sup>1</sup>, Robert Bartoszewicz<sup>1</sup>, Dariusz Kaczmarczyk<sup>2</sup>, Kazimierz Niemczyk<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Chair and Clinic of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Medical University of Warsaw, Poland; Head: prof. Kazimierz Niemczyk MD PhD

<sup>2</sup>Clinic of Head and Neck Cancer Surgery, Medical University of Lodz, Poland; Head: prof. Alina Morawiec-Sztandera MD PhD

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### ABSTRACT:

The first woman with a doctor's degree to practice in Poland was Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska (1854–1918). In Polish literature it is difficult to establish which of the women was the first to deal with diseases in the field of otorhinolaryngology. Pioneers in the specialty of otorhinolaryngology could be women who graduated from medical studies and completed "specialization" in clinics outside Poland or in Krakow, where the first department was established in Poland, and women were the first to have the opportunity to study medicine. In Poland, in 1925, out of 738 female doctors, only 4 of them dealt with diseases in the area of the head and neck, in 1938 21 women out of 2018 female doctors, and in 2020 out of 90.435 women, 1991 out of 3.378 doctors practicing the otorhinolaryngology. In Poland, Aleksandra Salomea Mitrinowicz-Modrzejewska was probably the first female otorhinolaryngologist who obtained her habilitation in 1947 and riched the title of professor in 1954. Until now, it has been established that only 27 women in Poland associated with otorhinolaryngology who have obtained the full professor title.

### KEYWORDS:

history of medicine, otorhinolaryngology, women in medicine, women in otorhinolaryngology

### STRESZCZENIE:

Pierwszą kobietą z dyplomem lekarza, która praktykowała na ziemiach polskich, była Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska (1854–1918). Na podstawie zachowanego piśmiennictwa polskiego trudno ustalić nazwisko kobiety lekarki, która jako pierwsza zajmowała się chorobami z zakresu otorynolaryngologii. Pionierkami w specjalności otorynolaryngologii mogły być kobiety, które ukończyły studia medyczne i odbyły „specjalizację” w klinikach poza Polską lub w Krakowie, gdzie powstała pierwsza katedra otolaryngologii na ziemiach polskich i kobiety po raz pierwszy uzyskały możliwość studiowania medycyny. W Polsce, w 1925 roku na 738 kobiet-lekarzy chorobami obejmującymi zakres otorynolaryngologii zajmowały się 4; w 1938 roku na 2018 kobiet – 21; w 2020 roku na 90 435 kobiet-lekarzy było 1991 otolaryngologów. Stanowiło to większość wśród 3378 wszystkich lekarzy tej specjalności. W Polsce najprawdopodobniej pierwszą kobietą otorynolaryngologiem, która uzyskała habilitację w 1947 roku i tytuł profesora nadzwyczajnego w 1954 roku, była Aleksandra Salomea Mitrinowicz-Modrzejewska. Udało się ustalić, że 27 kobiet w Polsce związanych z otorynolaryngologią uzyskało tytuł profesora.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** historia medycyny, kobiety w medycynie, kobiety w otorynolaryngologii, otorynolaryngologia

For many centuries, women were not allowed to study at universities or gain education in medical professions. In Europe, in modern history, studying at a university, including in the field of medicine, was only possible for them in Italy. The first institution to educate women was medical school in Salerno, and later University of Padua and University of Bologna also opened their door for women [1]. One of the pioneers in the medical and scientific professions was Dorothea Christiana Erxleben (1715–1762), who was the first woman in Germany to graduate from a university in the German city of Halle, and defended her doctoral dissertation there in 1754 receiving an MD [2]. The scientific revolution as well as gradual cultural and social changes in the second half of the 19th century enabled women to study medicine. In Europe, in Saint Petersburg, women first started to be admitted to medical studies in 1860, but later tsar's ukase deprived them of that right (Fig. 1).

The first American and British licensed doctor, awarded an MD on January 11, 1849 as the first woman in America, was Elizabeth Blackwell (1821–1910). Upon return to Great Britain, in 1874,

she established, along with other female doctors, the first medical school for women – London School of Medicine for Women [4].

On the Polish lands, the pioneer of the medical profession was Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska (1854–1918) (Fig. 2A., 2B.). She completed medical studies in Zurich in 1877, and validated her diploma in Saint Petersburg at the Medical and Surgical Academy. In 1880, she returned to Warsaw and started a private medical practice, specialising in women's diseases and paediatrics [5]. It is worth stressing that the first woman was admitted to the faculty of medicine at the University of Zurich in 1864 [6, 7].

The first woman of the Polish origin with a medical doctor's diploma was probably German-born Marie Elizabeth Zakrzewska (1829–1902). This American-based doctor received her diploma in 1856 and worked in the hospital in New York established by Elizabeth Blackwell [9].

It should be noted that "Słownik lekarzów Polskich" [Dictionary of the Polish doctors] by Stanisława Kościński contains a mention of



Fig. 1. Ear examination in a Russian hospital (1890), Emily Shanks (1857–1936), Museum in Chelmsford (Great Britain) [3].

Katarzyna (medica). Referring to lieutenant Świeżawski's memoirs, Kościński mentions that she lived in Krakow in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century [10].

In all annexed regions, women could not study medicine within the country and usually completed studies in Switzerland, France, Belgium. It all changed on March 23, 1897. After the parliament in Vienna adopted an appropriate law, women in Krakow and Lviv were allowed to study medicine. Not everyone was willing to accept and come to terms with such a significant socio-cultural change. Famous Krakow-based surgeon, Professor Ludwik Rydygier, even called for: „Not tolerating the freak of a female doctor in Poland” [11]. At universities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, initially women could only enrol in courses at the Faculty of Philosophy and Medicine (at the Faculty of Medicine, the “*numerus clausus*” principle was applied, with the number of women up to 10% of all the students). In Warsaw, it was not until 1916, when the Faculty of Medicine was opened, that women could become fully-fledged members of the academic community [1, 4].

After Poland regained independence, the situation changed significantly. Females were allowed to study in all fields, and the share of female students was continuously rising. In the 1921/1922 academic year, it was 23.2%, and in 1931/1932 – 28%. The biggest number of women studied humanities (64.5%), fine arts (49%), trade (29.2%), medicine (29.1%). Before the war, an average number of women studying at the Faculty of Medicine was from 15.5% at John Casimir University in Lviv to 25.5% at Stephen Bathory University in Vilnius [12]. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the percentage of women training as doctors has been continuously on the rise: in 1925, out of 7710 doctors, 738 (9.6%) were women; in 1938 the ratio was 12 592/2018 (16%), in 1960 – 28 708/11 025 (38.4%), in 1990 – 81 641/44 172 (54.1%), in 2020 – 153 270/90 435 (59%) [1, 13, 14, 15].

Female doctors started to more and more often practice in surgical specialities, previously reserved to males. The first woman practising as a surgeon was American, Mary Edwards Walker (1832–1919) [16]. On a side note, one should mention

Magdalena Bendzislawska – the first female “surgeon”, who by virtue of a diploma conferred by king Augustus Second the Strong on October 6, 1697 took on a job of a barber surgeon [17].

Among the first women to specialise in otorhinolaryngology was Alice Bryant (1862–1942). She graduated from Women's Medical College in New York in 1890. She was an excellent clinician, scientist, inventor of many surgical tools. A significant contribution to the development of otorhinolaryngology was made by: Margaret F. Butler, who invented several surgical instruments, including tonsil forceps and snares, bone forceps and nasal polyp tenaculum; Emily Van Loon introduced methods for removing foreign bodies through bronchoscopy, while neurologists: Lucja Frey described the auriculotemporal syndrome; Margaret Dix described a diagnostic manoeuvre for benign paroxysmal positional vertigo; Eleanor Bennett introduced a programme of otorhinolaryngology residency at the University of Wisconsin after she had become the first chairwoman in an American medical school [18, 19].

Based on the preserved literature, it is difficult to establish the name of the first woman in Poland specialising in otorhinolaryngology. In “*Kalendarz Informacyjny*” (Information Calendar) in 1909 in Warsaw, out of 21 female doctors, who most often dealt with internal diseases, women's and paediatric diseases (the concept of a specialised doctor as it is understood now did not exist yet at that time), only one, S. Dembowska, dealt with throat and ear diseases [20]. In later years, she probably dealt with internal diseases [21]. Female pioneers in the specialty of otorhinolaryngology could have been women who completed medical studies and underwent a “specialised training” in clinics outside of Poland or in Krakow, where the first department was established on the Polish lands and women for the first time were given a chance to study medicine.

In Poland, in 1925, out of 738 female doctors, 4 dealt with diseases in the area of the head and neck (0.54%):

- Gładkowska Eugenja (born in 1891, received a diploma in 1916) laryngological diseases (Warsaw),
- Kontrym Kunegunda (born in 1878, received a diploma in 1917) laryngological diseases, internal diseases (Warsaw),
- Landau Ada Róża (born in 1888, received a diploma in 1913) laryngological diseases (Krakow),
- Stiel Ella (born in 1887, received a diploma in 1914) ear and dental diseases (Bochnia) [13].

In 1938, out of 2018 women, 22 dealt with diseases in the area of the head and neck region (1.09%):

- Bejgel Raisa (born in 1897, received a diploma in 1927) laryngologist (Vilnius),
- Błęszyńska Janina Józefa (born in 1893, received a diploma in 1932) laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Chodakowska-Laskowska Stefania (born in 1897, received a diploma in 1931) anatomicopathologist laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Cichocka Irena (born in 1910, received a diploma in 1934) laryngologist (Warsaw) (Fig. 3.),



Fig. 2. (A, B) Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska (1854–1918) [8].

- Cichocka-Straus Hanna (born in 1906, received a diploma in 1935) laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Dworczyk Irena (born in 1897, received a diploma in 1923) laryngologist (Poznan),
- Godłowska-Czechowicz Zofia (born in 1903, received a diploma in 1929) laryngologist (Krakow),
- Goldkorn Łajwa (born in 1901, received a diploma in 1928) laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Koenigsteinowa Ernestyna (born in 1906, received a diploma in 1933) laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Kontrymowna Kunegunda (born in 1878, received a diploma in 1917) laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Krygowska Maria (born in 1895, received a diploma in 1922) laryngologist (Lviv),
- Landau Ada Róża (born in 1888, received a diploma in 1913) laryngologist (Krakow),
- Połotniuk-Prystaj Natalia (born in 1895, received a diploma in 1922) laryngologist (Stanisławow),
- Reinhart Zofia (born in 1904, received a diploma in 1930) laryngologist (Ciechanow),
- Sawicz-Mittendorf Sabina (born in 1903, received a diploma in 1931) otolaryngologist (Inowrocław),
- Sembratowicz Lidia (born in 1908, received a diploma in 1935) laryngologist (Pruszkow),
- Szomańska Eugenia (born in 1891, received a diploma in 1916) otolaryngologist (Warsaw),
- Szumska-Mucha Ajsza (born in 1910, received a diploma in 1935) laryngologist (Vilnius),
- Wajntal-Chorażycka Aleksandra (born in 1906, received a diploma in 1925) laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Wajntraub Anna (born in 1909, received a diploma in 1936) laryngologist (Warsaw),
- Weiserowa Leonia (born in 1899, received a diploma in 1928) laryngologist (Lviv),
- Zacharczuk-Zwolska Waleria (born in 1904, received a diploma in 1928) laryngologist (Poryck) [14, 22].

In 2020, out of 90 435 female doctors in Poland, 1991 were otolaryngologists, accounting for 58.94% of all the otolaryngologists (3378). The percentage of women practising the profession of audiologist and phoniatrist was 75.79% (285), and that of child otolaryngologist – 65.07% (136) [15]. For comparison, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), in the USA in 2017, out of 9520 otolaryngologists, 1630 (17.1%) were women [23].

Apart from practising the profession, females more and more often obtained scientific titles, became heads of university and hospital



**Fig. 3.** Irena Cichocka with Dr. Cz. Gawlikowski, Warsaw, 1937 (from the collections of K. Szumilin).

Departments. The first clinical professor of laryngology and head of the nose and throat ward in Pennsylvania in 1906 was the already mentioned Margaret Butler [18, 19]. In America in 2019, 85 out of 531 professors of otolaryngology were females (16%), and only 3 out of 87 Departments of Otolaryngology were led by women (3.4%) [24]. The first woman in Poland who defended her doctoral dissertation in 1906 at the Jagiellonian University was Helena Donhaiser-Sikorska (1873–1945) [25]. In 1920, Helena Gajewska (1888–1971), Doctor of Philosophy, assistant in the histological division, was the first to receive the titles of a docent and associate professor. She obtained habilitation (post-doctoral degree) in comparative anatomy. Her habilitation oral examination took place on February 21, 1920, the lecture – on February 27, and the habilitation was approved on March 31 [26]. By decision of the Chief of State from September 22, 1920, Helena Gajewska, docent of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, was appointed to associate professor of histology at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Poznan, as of October 1, 1920 [27]. Habilitation procedures were only opened at the Faculty of Philology, which was most willing to accept women. An exception is Helena Schuster (1884–1947), who obtained habilitation at the Faculty of Medicine of the John Casimir University in Lviv in 1934, and Janina Kowalczyk (1906–1970), who did so at the Faculty of Medicine of the Jagiellonian University in 1936. The first woman with the title of a professor of the Jagiellonian University was Helena Willman-Grabowska (1870–1957). She was appointed to the post of associate professor in 1928, but the title of full professor was not conferred to her by the Jagiellonian University until 1937 [28].



**Fig. 4.** Aleksandra Salomea Mitrinowicz-Modrzejewska (painted by Janina Kowalewska-Tarkowska), University and Hospital Department of Otolaryngology, Neck and Head Surgery, 1a Banacha Street, Warsaw.

In Poland, probably the first woman otolaryngologist, who obtained habilitation in 1947 based on the thesis „Koordynacyjna niedomoga głosowa (Phonasthenia)” [Coordinative Phonasthenia] and the title of full professor in 1954, was Aleksandra Salomea Mitrinowicz-Modrzejewska (Fig. 4.).

During the work on this paper, it was found based on available data that 27 women in Poland associated with otolaryngology received the title of professor:

1. Teofila Aniela Bystrzanowska (Warsaw),
2. Hanna Teresa Brzezińska (Lodz),
3. Irena Cichocka-Szumilin (Warsaw),
4. Tatiana Gierek (Katowice),
5. Teresa Goździk-Żołnierkiewicz (Warsaw),
6. Danuta Gryczyńska (Lodz),
7. Elżbieta Hassman-Poznańska (Białystok),
8. Magdalena Józefowicz-Korczyńska (Lodz),
9. Ewa Kossowska (Warsaw),
10. Bożena Koszyła-Hojna (Białystok),
11. Aleksandra Kruk-Zagajewska (Poznan),
12. Janusza Kubiczkowa (Warsaw),
13. Grażyna Lisowska (Zabrze),
14. Grażyna Mielnik-Niedzielska (Lublin),
15. Wanda Mitkiewicz-Bochenek (Warsaw),
16. Aleksandra Mitrinowicz-Modrzejewska (Warsaw),
17. Alina Morawiec-Sztandera (Lodz),

18. Ewa Olszewska (Białystok),
19. Ewa Osuch-Wójcikiewicz (Warsaw),
20. Lucyna Pośpiech (Wrocław),
21. Elżbieta Reroń (Kraków),
22. Katarzyna Starska-Kowarska (Łódź),
23. Mariola Śliwińska-Kowalska (Łódź),
24. Czesława Tarnowska (Szczecin),
25. Małgorzata Wierzbicka (Poznań),
26. Maria Zalesska-Kręcicka (Wrocław),
27. Beata Daria Zielińska-Jurkiewicz (Warsaw).

Current heads of departments include:

- Ewa Jaworowska – Department of Adult and Paediatric Otolaryngology and Laryngological Oncology, Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin,
- Grażyna Mielnik-Niedzielska – Department of Paediatric Otolaryngology, Phoniatics and Audiology, Medical University of Lublin,
- Alina Morawiec-Sztandera – Department of the Surgery of Head and Neck Cancers, Medical University of Łódź,
- Wioletta Pietruszewska – Department of Otolaryngology and Oncological Laryngology, Medical University of Łódź,

- Bożena Skotnicka – Department of Paediatric Otolaryngology, Medical University of Białystok,
- Mariola Śliwińska-Kowalska – Department of Audiology and Phoniatics, Instytut Medycyny Pracy im. prof. J. Nofera w Łodzi (Prof. J. Nofer's Institute of Occupational Medicine in Łódź),
- Małgorzata Wierzbicka – University and Hospital Department of Otolaryngology and Oncological Laryngology, Poznań University of Medical Sciences,
- Anna Zakrzewska – Department of Otolaryngology, Audiology and Paediatric Phoniatics, Medical University of Łódź,
- Lidia Zawadzka-Głós – Department of Paediatric Otolaryngology, Medical University of Warsaw.

To conclude, we would like to cite a statement by Adam Tyszkiewicz, PhD, Director of the Museum of the History of Medicine, Medical University of Warsaw: "It was difficult at the beginning, women faced numerous obstacles at the university, men often did not make their life or work easy. Today, without a doubt and without hesitation, everyone of them would admit that »University without women would be like a garden without flowers« [11].

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Corresponding author: Antoni Bruzgielewicz MD PhD; Chair and Clinic of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Medical University of Warsaw; Banacha street 1a, 02-097 Warsaw, Poland; Phone: +48 22 599 25 21, +48 22 599 17 21; E-mail: [a.bruzgielewicz@wp.pl](mailto:a.bruzgielewicz@wp.pl)

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