Helena B. Fedukowicz (1900-1998)

Helena B. Fedukowicz, a pioneer educator in oculcular bacteriology, reminisced that her life was like a fairy tale—with a sad beginning and a happy ending.

Born in the Ukraine, she graduated from the Yekaterinoslav Medical Academy, Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, in 1921 and joined its faculty. Thereafter, she lectured on ocular infections at the Moscow Eye Hospital and became a professor of ophthalmology at the Kiev Medical School, where she completed a thesis on intraocular melanoma. In 1942, she became a professor of ophthalmology in Vinniza (Ukraine) and married Waclaw Fedukowicz, a geophysicist. During this time, Dr Biantovskaya met Ivan Pavlov and Vladimir Filatov and encountered Nikolai Bukharin, leader of the communist party’s right wing, while mountain climbing. When Stalin rose to power, that suspicious chance encounter prompted an investigation. A daughter of an Orthodox priest, she was next accused of poisoning a drinking well with laboratory bacteria. These “awful, miserable years” worsened with the Nazi invasion and closing of her medical school. Fleeing to Poland, the married couple were captured and sent to a work camp in Germany. They managed to escape, but spent 5 years confined at a Bavarian settlement village, awaiting assistance from the International Relief Organization. Without citizenship or passports, they were “suspended between heaven and earth.” Ultimately, they were able to emigrate to America.

When they arrived in America in 1949, the penniless couple lived in an unfurnished apartment in Brooklyn, NY. Through the Polish Committee, Dr Fedukowicz met an exiled aristocrat, Prince Sapieha, whose philanthropic connections changed her life. Through him, she met George N. Wise, MD, at New York University, who was impressed by her clinical expertise and obtained a fellowship for her in the department of ophthalmology studying the eyes of children with tuberculosis. Although she did not have a US medical degree, she was appointed director of ophthalmic bacteriology at New York University’s Bellevue Hospital. She insisted that residents bring every patient with a putative ocular infection to her laboratory, where together they would collect, examine, and culture microbial specimens and engage in Socratic quizzing.

Dr Fedukowicz’s research contributions were largely clinical. She authored more than 25 Russian publications, including articles on ocular rosacea, lysozyme, and pigmented limbal lesions. Her seminal American contribution involved the relationship between the derelicts of New York’s Bowery, near Bellevue Hospital, and the high incidence in that population of Moraxella keratoconjunctivitis. Leaving the laboratory, she and her residents would trek to the Bowery, culture material in hand, and examine the local derelicts. The team would enter bars, offering 50 cents to any who would submit to a quick swab. In this way, Dr Fedukowicz was able to trace Moraxella to its endemic source, link it to alcoholism and malnutrition, and clarify the organism’s taxonomy, morphology, and clinical characteristics.

In 1963, her classic text, External Infections of the Eye, the first English text on the subject, was published. The unanimously applauded volume emphasized clinicomicrobiologic correlation, enhanced by remarkable color plates by Beatrice Grover, and found an instant niche at teaching institutions.

Dr Fedukowicz retired to Sarasota, Fla, in 1976. Well into her 90s, she entertained her former students during the week of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology conference with home-cooked meals and an oral examination in Russian writers and composers. She was elected as an honorary fellow of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and was honored for lifetime scholarly contributions by the Immunology/Microbiology Section of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology. During her final years, despite macular degeneration, she would optimistically exclaim, “I still have 4 and a half senses!” We will remember Helena Fedukowicz as a warm and regal lady, as well as a gifted microbiologist and clinician, who was blessed with an unquenchable passion for sharing her insights with students everywhere throughout her long life.

Norman C. Charles, MD
Susan M. Stetson, MD
New York, NY
Jules L. Baum, MD
Boston, Mass
Continuing Education for Ophthalmologists

This list of continuing education opportunities for ophthalmologists is published monthly as a service to readers to help them keep abreast of meetings and courses of interest and importance. Presented by regional and national location, the list is updated monthly and provides an easy reference to continuing medical education (CME) courses. Accredited sponsors are encouraged to notify the ARCHIVES of upcoming CME activities for inclusion in the list free of charge. Listings will be published for 3 consecutive months and should be received at least 5 months prior to date of course, eg, for a June course by January 1 to be included in the March, April, and May issues. A course held between the first and 14th days, inclusively, will appear in the preceding month’s issue. The listing cannot be published unless it contains the following information: title, location, date(s), sponsor(s), and contact address. Optional information includes CME category 1 hours of instruction, registration fee, and guest speakers. Listings should be typed double-spaced with 2-inch left and right margins. Send submissions to Editor, Archives of Ophthalmology, CME, Suite 102, 2870 University Ave, Madison, WI 53705. Readers are encouraged to contact the accredited sponsor for more detailed information.

IOWA

University of Iowa School of Medicine November Clinical Congress At: Iowa City Date: 11/3/00 Contact: Department of Ophthalmology, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242; (319) 356-3990, fax (319) 356-0363

University of Iowa School of Medicine December Clinical Congress At: Iowa City Date: 12/1/00 Contact: Department of Ophthalmology, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242; (319) 356-3990, fax (319) 356-0363

MARYLAND

The 13th Annual Wilmer Institute’s Current Concepts in Ophthalmology At: Baltimore Date: 12/7-12/9/00 Hrs Instr: 20 Course Dir: Walter J. Stark, MD Fee: Physicians, $300; Residents, Fellows and Allied Health Professionals, $250 Contact: Program Coordinator, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Office of Continuing Medical Education, Turner 207/20 Rutland Ave, Baltimore, MD 21205; (410) 955-2959, (410) 614-8613, e-mail: cmenet@som.adm.jhu.edu

NEW MEXICO

XIV International Congress of Eye Research At: Santa Fe Date: 10/15-10/20/00 Contact: XIV ICER Secretariat, Attention: Professor N. A. Delamere, KY Lions Center, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292; (502) 852-5459, (502) 852-7450, e-mail: icervx@ulkvm.louisville.edu

NEW YORK

Consultations on Low Vision Practice Management: Exploratory Consultation At: New York City Date: By Appointment Contact: Lighthouse Continuing Medical Education, 111 E 59th St, New York, NY 10022-1202; (212) 821-9740, (800) 829-0500, fax (212) 821-9705, e-mail: education@lighthouse.org

Consultations on Low Vision Practice Management: Customized Service Planning At: New York City Date: By Appointment Fee: $250 Contact: Lighthouse Continuing Medical Education, 111 E 59th St, New York, NY 10022-1202; (212) 821-9740, (800) 829-0500, fax (212) 821-9705, e-mail: education@lighthouse.org

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

25th Annual Pediatric Ophthalmology Days At: Montreal, Quebec Date: 10/13-10/14/00 Contact: Jean Milot, MD, Chairman of the Scientific Program, Department of Ophthalmology, Hôpital Sainte-Justine, 3175, chemin Côte-Sainte-Catherine, Montreal, Quebec, H3T 1C3; (514) 345-4715, fax (514) 345-4880

FRANCE

International Optics and Eyewear Exhibition At: Paris Date: 10/27-10/30/00 Contact: Allegra Cramb or Emmanuelle Cade; (888) 522-5001, e-mail: expo@promosalons.com

Correction

Error in Byline. In the Obituary titled “Helena B. Fedukowicz (1900-1998),” in the April issue of the ARCHIVES (Arch Ophthalmol. 2000;118:595), there was an error in the byline. The second author’s name, Susan M. Stenson, MD, was misspelled as “Stetson.” The journal regrets the error.