

Doctor Helena Maria Kornella (1897–1992) – the first female urologist in Poland*

Doktor Helena Maria Kornella (1897–1992) – pierwsza kobieta urolog w Polsce

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The battle for women to receive general acceptance as medical doctors started as late as the 19th century. At the turn of the century, several United States female doctors were already carrying out urological operations. The earliest known history of American women in urology began with women such as Marie B. Werner, who worked in the field despite being prohibited from treating males. The first female chief of urology was Mary E. Childs MacGregor, born in 1928, who championed urology fellowship training for women. She is credited with inspiring Elisabeth Pauline Pickett, the first board certified urologist, in 1966. She was followed thirteen years later by Mary L. Gannon, who was the first female member of the AUA in 1975.

Dora Brücke-Teleky was the first woman to be a member of the German Urological Society, in 1911, and in 1920 became a member of newly founded Vienna Urological Society.

Sophia Lisovskaya was the first woman urologist in Russia, and was nominated as the first Professor of Urology at the St. Petersburg Medical Institute in 1923, and held this post till 1952. She was probably the first academic female urologist of the 20th century. Urology is a typical example of a discipline in which male dominance among specialists was overwhelming until the 1970s. The aim of the study is to present Doctor Helena Maria Kornella, the first female assistant of the Department of Urology in Lwów (today in Lviv, Ukraine), and also to outline her heroic activity

and life experiences in the stormy and dramatic years of the Second World War.

Materials: Extensive research was undertaken to collect literature and documents in the United Kingdom and in Polish archives and libraries. Photographs, documents and other materials from the collection of her family were also used to prepare this study.

Biography: Helena Kornella was born on 6th November, 1897 in Jasło. Her father, Michael Kornella, a graduate of Vienna Technical School was an engineer. Helena graduated at the University of Lwów, in 1928. She received her urological training in Lwów. Later on she worked as an assistant in the Department of Internal Medicine in this city. After the Soviet invasion and occupation of Poland in 1940, she, her mother, sister-in-law and her 3-month-old niece were deported into the depths of Kazakhstan. She worked as a physician in Sergiopol, Tehran and Beirut.

In 1950 Dr. Kornella entered Great Britain. She worked professionally throughout her life, until her retirement, aged 70. She died in Essex on 27th May, 1992.

Conclusions: Helena Maria Kornella was the first female resident of the Department of Urology in Lwów. She fought epidemics of typhoid fever and was a foster mother of Polish orphans in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: history of medicine; urology; women; Lwów; Lemberg; Lviv.

ABSTRAKT

Wstęp: Dopuszczenie kobiet do studiów medycznych nastąpiło dopiero w drugiej połowie XIX w. Jednak tylko nieliczne lekarki interesowały się chirurgią. Na przełomie XIX i XX w. już kilka lekarek amerykańskich wykonywało operacje na narządach moczowych. Pionierem była Marie B. Werner, która mogła leczyć wyłącznie kobiety. Mary E. Childs MacGregor (1896–1955) odbyła całkowite szkolenie urologiczne w 1928 r. i została pierwszym szefem urologii w Nowym Jorku. Była inspiratorem kariery urologicznej dr Elisabeth Pickett, która w 1966 r. została pierwszą kobietą dyplomowanym urologiem w Ameryce.

W 1911 r. Dora Brücke-Teleky została pierwszą kobietą urologiem, członkiem Niemieckiego Towarzystwa Urologicznego, a w 1920 r. Wiedeńskiego Towarzystwa Urologicznego. W 1923 r. Sophia Lisovskaja pierwsza na świecie została profesorem urologii Instytutu Medycznego w St. Petersburgu; kierowała nim do 1952 r. Jednak poza pojedynczymi wyjątkami urologia była do lat 70. XX w. domeną mężczyzn.

Celem pracy było przedstawienie pierwszej kobiety, asystentki Oddziału Urologicznego we Lwowie, pokazanie jej bohaterskich,

czynów i przeżyć w burzliwych i dramatycznych latach II wojny światowej.

Materiały: Do publikacji wykorzystano materiały z bibliotek i archiwów angielskich oraz polskich, jak również fotografie i dokumenty ze zbiorów rodzinnych Kornelli.

Życiorys: Helena Kornella urodziła się 6 listopada 1897 r. w Jasle. Ojciec inżynier Michał Kornella ukończył studia Techniczne w Wiedniu, a doktoryzował się na Politechnice Lwowskiej. Matką była Jadwiga z domu Hoszowska. Helena ukończyła studia medyczne na Uniwersytecie Lwowskim w 1928 r. Po studiach była asystentką na Oddziale Urologicznym, następnie pracowała na Oddziale Chorób Wewnętrznych we Lwowie.

W kwietniu 1940 r. wraz z matką, bratową oraz 3-miesięczną bratanicą została wywieziona do Kazachstanu. Początkowo odbywała „wyrok ciężkich robót” w Sowchozie. Następnie pracowała jako lekarz w Sergiopolu, a w 1941 r. w Pomocniczej Wojskowej Służbie Kobiet. Potem była opiekunką polskich sierot, które przewiozła do Teheranu. Następnie była opiekunką Bejrutczyków w Libanie.

* The article has been based on the diary of Dr. Helena Maria Kornella, written reports of her adoptive daughter Dr. Halina Twardzicki, and interviews with her mother-in-law, Dr. Helena Kornella by University lecturer Andrzej Twardzicki.

W 1950 r. przybyła do Anglii. Tam pracowała jako lekarz do 70. roku życia. Zmarła w Essex w 1992 r.

Podsumowanie: Doktor Helena Maria Kornella była pierwszą kobietą asystentką Oddziału Urologicznego we Lwowie. Ofiarne

pracowała przy zwalczaniu epidemii tyfusu i była opiekunką polskich sierot w Kazachstanie.

Słowa kluczowe: historia medycyny; urologia; kobiety; Lwów; Lemberg; Lviv.

INTRODUCTION

Women have been recognized in medicine since ancient times. They were working with sick people in ancient Egypt, the Roman Empire and Eastern cultures. From the middle ages women most often worked as midwives. They were active in connection with the church, while the wives or daughters of wound-surgeons could also participate in the activities of the male surgeon.

The real battle for women to receive general acceptance and later official accreditation as medical doctors started as late as the 19th century. For such a development to be possible, women doctors have had to travel a long and stony way. Many surgical fields have attracted only a few female doctors.

Until 1970 women never made up more than 6% of any medical school class in the United States or Canada. The American College of Surgeons admitted 1 woman in 1913, Florence Duckering, and then 0–5 women per year until 1970 [1, 2, 3].

The two prominent Polish female physicians of the 19th century are also worth mentioning.

During the third partition of Poland (1795), Martin Ludwig Zakrzewski and his wife, Caroline Fredericke Urban, fled to Berlin after losing much of his land to the Russian power. After settling into their new life in Berlin, their first daughter Marie Elisabeth was born on 6th September, 1829. Like her mother, she became a midwife, advancing to the position of chief of the midwifery programme at the Charitè Hospital in Berlin, but she was resented by the male doctors there.

She emigrated to the United States in 1852, where she met Dr. Elisabeth Blackwell, the first woman to receive a medical degree (1849). Blackwell encouraged her to attend the medical school at Cleveland's Western Reserve University, from which Zakrzewska graduated in 1856. Thereafter, she worked together with Blackwell at the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, the first Hospital focusing on paediatrics and women's health. In 1859 Zakrzewska moved to Boston to teach at the New England Female Medical College of Boston, the first medical school for women in the world, and in 1862 she opened the New England Hospital for Women and Children.

She was one of the most prominent female physicians in 19th century America. Best known for creating a modern hospital and a medical education programme for women, Zakrzewska helped found the New England Women's Club, and was active in the American Women Suffrage Association. Marie Zakrzewska died in Boston at the age of 73 [4, 5].

Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska (1854–1918) was the second Polish woman to become a doctor, and the first female Polish doctor to practice in Poland. Despite enormous obstacles

she became one of the best doctors in the field of gynaecology and obstetrics. She obtained her medical degree in 1877 in Zurich. During her fifth year of study in Zurich she worked as an assistant to Professor Edward Hitzig (a German neurologist and psychiatrist) in the Institute for the Mentally Ill. After obtaining her medical degree she worked briefly in Berlin and Vienna for a short time [1]. However, she was not allowed to pass the state exam, which would have given her the right to practice medicine in Poland, and she was refused as a member of the Polish Society of Medicine because she was a woman. She moved to St. Petersburg and passed the state exam there. This allowed her to practice women's health and paediatric medicine within the Polish Kingdom and Russia. In 1882 an epidemic of infection during childbirth broke out in Warsaw, and five maternity shelters were opened, one of which (Prosta Street) was given to Anna to lead. She led the facility for obstetric patients until its closing in 1911. She was the first to perform a Caesarean section in Warsaw, in 1896. She gained fame and huge trust, and became one of the most successful doctors in Warsaw. She was also one of the founders of the Society of Polish Culture. She also participated in the work of various women's organizations [6, 7].

The controversy about admitting women to medical studies can be found at the Polish Universities in Lwów (Lemberg) and also in Cracow. Professor Ludwig Rydygier (1850–1920) was an uncompromising opponent of admitting women to medical studies, and in particular to allowing women to specialize in surgery. He expressed his feelings in PL (Physician Review) in 1895 and in "Wien. Klin. Wschr" in 1896. Entering into a polemic with Rydygier, Professor Napoleon Cybulski (1854–1919) argued against these views, and the whole question of women in medicine was the subject of lively debate among European doctors at that time. In an article in Polish, concluding his discussion with Professor Cybulski on this matter, Rydygier ended with his personal wish: "So away with the female doctor freaks! We don't want them in Poland!" In the German-language article, however, he formulated his opposition rather more diplomatically [8].

Urology is a typical example where male dominance is still overwhelming. Times are changing, because during the last 60 years we have witnessed a continual increase in the number of female urologists in many European countries [1, 9, 10].

In the second half of the 19th century Poland had numerous skilled surgeons, but only outstanding doctors engaged in urology. The process of the establishing of the first urological wards has been described adequately. The first ward of urology was established in 1905 at Holy Spirit Hospital in Warsaw (head: Dr. Adam Mincer, 1867–1914), followed in 1918 by one in

Lwów (chief: Dr. Zenon Leńko, 1868–1950) and in Cracow (director: Docent Tadeusz Pisarski, 1878–1936), in 1929. These cities have also had many surgeons whose names have left a lasting trace in the history of our speciality.

The first professor of urology in Poland was Dr. Stanisław Laskownicki (1892–1978) from Lwów, 1938 [11, 12].

While in the history of medicine important events and discoveries are mostly attributed to the work and discoveries of great and highly esteemed individuals, there was also a host of less well known, faceless doctors and surgeons, who sometimes practised their profession under extremely difficult conditions – perhaps because of war or other extreme life circumstances – built up their professional community, and preserved values that deserve to be remembered.

Not only the heads of the departments, but also their associates and co-workers have contributed enormously to medicine and patients [11, 12].

One such doctor was an outstanding Lwów urologist and general practitioner (GP), Dr. Helena Maria Kornella, who from 1940 to 1950 became one of the foremost organizers of health services for countless Polish prisoners in the Soviet Union and Polish immigrants in Iran and Lebanon. She was also a highly versatile GP and the author of scientific and historical communications [13, 14, 15].

BIOGRAPHY, EARLY LIFE

Until now there has been no printed biography of Dr. Helena Maria Kornella. There are only a few short reports in Archives and Libraries in London and in Poland (Fig. 1). Helena Maria

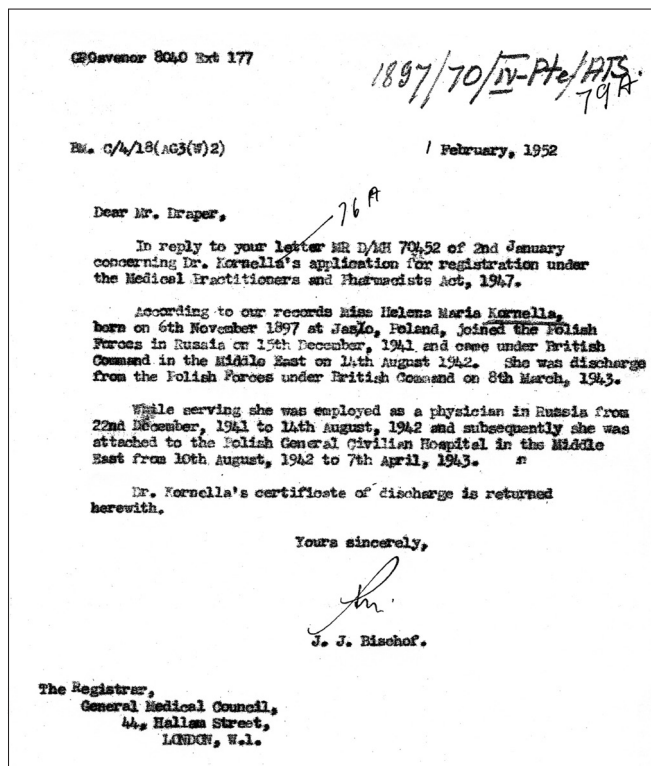


FIGURE 1. Military report, 1952.



FIGURE 2. Helena Maria Kornella (1897–1992), ca 1950

Kornella was born on 6th November, 1897 in Jasło (at that time belonging to the Austria-Hungarian Empire) – Figure 2. She was the daughter of Michael K. (1862–1911) and Jadwiga Sas-Hoszowska (1873–1942). Her father, a graduate of Vienna Technical School, was a civil engineer. After moving to Lwów he became the first student to be awarded a Ph.D. degree at Lemberg’s Polytechnic School.

Helena attended the Classical High School (Real Gymnasium of SS Nazareth) in Lemberg, where she attained her certificate in 1917.

Having completed her secondary education, Helena, with the help of her grandmother, had to support her mother in looking after her two younger brothers. She supported her



FIGURE 3. University of “Jan Kazimierz” in Lwów, 1919–1939



FIGURE 4. The only 3 women graduated 1928 (Helena M. Kornella on left)

family after the premature death of her father, and later also throughout the First World War.

Helena's early interest in pursuing medicine as a career was in those years unusual for women, and particularly difficult to realise in her family circumstances. The idea was also strongly opposed by the family.

In January 1922 she commenced studies in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Lwów (now Lviv) – Figure 3. She was one of the very few first women in the faculty. She graduated and obtained her Diploma as Doctor of General Medical Sciences in 1928. She was one of only 3 women who graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at University of Lwów in 1928 (Fig. 4) [14, 15, 16].

She received urological training, working for over 6 years at the Department of Urology of the State General Hospital in Lwów (head: Prof. Stanisław Laskownicki, 1892–1978). She was the first Polish female assistant (resident) of the urological department during the interwar Poland. Prof. Laskownicki writes in his book "Professional memoirs" about his first female assistant: "At that time in the clinic worked Dr. Kornellanka, who received not half bad urological training. Unfortunately, at that time she had not too much surgical experience, so she operated with the jitters and was a bit nervous (stage fright). As a house officer (intern), she carried responsibility for the women's ward. She did her job very well" [11, 17].

She received her urological training as assistant at the Department of Urology in Lwów. Later on she worked as an assistant at the Department of Internal Medicine until the beginning of the Second World War in 1939 [14, 15, 17].

While successfully developing her medical career in that speciality, she also realised her second ambition of graduating with distinction in operatic Lied singing (as a mezzo soprano) in Lwów Conservatory. In Lwów she gave vocal recitals on the radio for patients [18].

Kornella's successfully developing professional life was dramatically interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

A SHORT HISTORY OF LWÓW (LEMBERG, LVIV)

The city was founded in 1272 by Prince Daniel (Danylo) Romanovich of Galicia. He named it in honour of his son Lev (Lion). The city's position, controlling east-west and south-north routes, and passes across the Carpathians, has given it a stormy history. The Romanovich dynasty attempted to gain papal and broader support in Europe for an alliance against the Mongols, but proved unable to compete with the rising powers of the centralised Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland. In 1349, Polish King Kazimierz III (Casimir the great, 1310–1370) captured the city, granted it Magdeburg rights, and invited Jews from Western Europe. Lwów was rebuilt, and in the course of time it became a major trade, cultural and industrial centre. Later on it became home to many immigrants from Poland, Germany, Armenia and other European Countries. Lwów belonged to Poland until 1772. At that time many beautiful churches and other grand buildings were built in Lwów.

After 1772, the first partition of Poland, Lwów was ruled by Austria. Austria changed the name Lwów to Lemberg, and made it the capital of Galicia. At the beginning of the 19th century a campaign of Germanization started which led to the outbreak of public dissent. As a result, the Galician Parliament (Sejm Krajowy) was opened, and in 1867 Galicia was granted vast autonomy. However, only lectures in Polish were allowed at that time. During the whole of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire rule the pre-eminence of Poles gave them more power in the Administration and Council, even if the Habsburg dynasty were evidently playing with one another for their own interests. In the 19th century the Poles owned most of the land, and the Jews owned most of the shops and Inns.

After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire 1918, Western Galicia and Lwów again became part of the restored Second Polish Republic.

On 23rd April, 1931 the population of Lwów was 312,000, of whom 198,200 were Poles 75,300 were Jews, 35,000 were Ukrainian, 2,500 were German and 500 were Russian. The mix of nationalities lent Lwów (Lviv) great cultural diversity and a cosmopolitan political character. Lwów was a home town for Poles, with 650 years of history, until ethnic cleaning.

After the conclusion of the war Allied leaders met at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam and decided to return Poland to its medieval boundaries. The frontiers shifted 120 miles west, and Lwów (now Lviv), became part of Ukraine in 1944. From 24th August, 1991 Lviv belonged to newly-independent Ukraine [8, 11, 19].

DEPORTATION TO THE DEPTHS OF THE SOVIET UNION

On 23rd August, 1939, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed. The Soviet Union had participated with Nazi Germany in the invasion and partition of Poland. In the month that followed, the Soviet Department of the Interior (NKVD) began a policy of ethnic cleansing in the area to weed out what they called socially dangerous and anti-soviet elements. The vast majority were convicted for no known offence, but simply because the Polish nation was seen as the inveterate enemy of its Soviets masters. As a result, an estimated 1.7 million Polish civilians were forcibly expelled from their homes in the course of four mass deportations to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

One woman who lived to tell was a physician, Dr. Helena M. Kornella from Lwów, who was strong enough to withstand the rigorous and inhuman transport and life in labour camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan: Due to very bad life circumstances, starvation and diseases mortality was immense. By 1942, only half of the Polish citizens arrested by the Soviets at the start of the war were still alive [8, 14].

On 13th April, 1940, at 2 a.m. Soviet political police (NKWD) broke into the flat of Dr. Kornella's family, giving them 1.5 hours to prepare for forced deportation to Siberia. She left a diary from her captivity in the Soviet Union, from 1940 to 1942 (Fig. 5) [20].

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Ochot. Dr Kornella Helena

(11185)

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Wywieziono mnie dnia 13 kwietnia 1940 r. wraz z matką starszą, lat 67, ślepa, chorą na guz w mózgu, bratową z niedomaganiem serca oraz 4-miesięczną bratanicą. Powodem wywiezienia było to, że 2 moich braci oficerów W.P., znajdowało się w obozie jeńców w Starobielsku. Wyroku miłt nam nie ogłoszł, jedynie oficer NKWD powiedział nam, że zostaliśmy skazani na 10 lat ciężkich robót, nie chciał jednak powiedzieć za co.

Dnia 1 maja 1940 przybyliśmy na miejsce przemieszczenia, t.j. do sokołowa Myn-Bużak, feraz 4, Ajagucki rejon, Semipalatyńskaja obłast. Umieszczono nas w izbie, mającej 4 m² wraz z dwoma rodzinami, razem 10 osób. Początkowo pracowałam przy wyrobie "kizilka" t.j. opatu z byłego nawozu; następnie przy plewieniu. Dnia 28 sierpnia 1940 r. zawieziono mnie wraz z rodziną do miasteczka w Sergiopol, Ajagucki rejon, do szpitala, w którym miałam obowiązek pracować jako lekarz.

Z powodu wybuchu wojny między Niemcami a ZSRR, przeniesiano znów wszystkich Polaków na Kamy. Powróciłam i ja wraz z rodziną do Sokołowa. Teraz pracowałam przy oczyszczaniu zboża. Zwolniono nas dnia 28 sierpnia 1941.

Natychmiast opuściliśmy sokołoz Myn-Bużak i udaliśmy się na południe, gdzie otrzymałam posadę lekarza rejonowego w miasteczku Sary-Guk, Alma-Atyńskiej obłasti. Równocześnie wysłałam prośbę do polskich Sił Zbrojnych w Dżambuku, prosząc o przyjęcie mnie do PSK. Prośba moja została wysłuchana. Dnia 15 grudnia 1941 zostałam wcielona w szeregi PSK. Wyżano mnie dnia 22 grudnia wraz z dwoma siostrami sanitarkami do Dżambuku, jako Dworcową i Łodówkę Sanitarną. Zadaniem naszym było niesienie pomocy - olaknu, przejeżdżającym przez Dżambuk, idącymi z północnej Rosji na południe, oraz opieka nad rodzinami polskimi, mieszkającymi w tym mieście.

Zaiste praca straszna, jechali nie ludzie, a cienie, z ciężkimi postaciami skorbutu, poparzeni, w tym czasie wybuchła epidemia tyfusu plamistego. Zdejmowaliśmy przeważnie 12 - 15 osób chorych na tyfus plamisty z jednego "essatoru", by umieścić ich w szpitalu, śmiertelność w tych podługach nieprawdopodobna. W jednym essatorze jechało 4-5 sieroty, których rodzice zmarli w drodze. - Nieść im pomoc, ale jak? Szywność, jak chleb lub ciepła zupa, by ludzi tych nakarmić, nie można było dostać. Nie było również lekarstw, ani środków opatrunkowych w aptekach. Dopiero w połowie marca 1942 otrzymałyśmy pakę lekarstw. Teraz mogłyśmy nie tylko dobrym słowem pomagać tym biednym, wydziedziczonym z wolności chorym rodakom. Równocześnie szaleje epidemia tyfusu plamistego w mieście Dżambuk. Wzywają mnie do pomagania 8 wypadków dziennie. Nęda u tych ludzi straszna, żyje po kilkanaście osób w zimnych, wilgotnych ciemnych norach. Bielony ani śladu. Okryci strępnymi kachmanami, brudni, głodni, zawstawieni. Nie ma w szpitalach niema, gdyż wszystkie szpitale przepełnione; jeśli jest miejsce w szpitalu, to brak środków lokomocji. Nie było dziwnego, że śmiertelność w tych warunkach zagrażająca, - wynierają całe rodziny.

Mojej rodziny nie oszczędziła również epidemia: w styczniu umiera matka, w tygodniu później bratowa. Dziwnym trafem ani ja, ani siostry sanitarki pracujące ze mną, na tyfus nie zachorowały.

W kwietniu tyfus plamisty powoli wygasa. Walczymy teraz z ciężkimi postaciami awitaminozą (skorbut), oraz ogólnym wyczerpaniem organizmu. Walka trudna, omalże beznadsiejsza, wobec zupełnego braku braku owoców i jakiegokolwiek środków spożywczych.

Dnia 8 sierpnia 1942 odwołano nas do Jangi-Julu, skąd dnia 19 sierpnia wyruszyłam wraz z transportem sierot i rodzin wojskowych do Irznu.

FIGURE 5. Diary of Dr. Helena Maria Kornella

MEMOIRS OF DOCTOR HELENA KORNELLA. VOLUNTARY FEMALE MEDICAL AID RECRUIT¹

"I was deported from my home town, Lwów on 13th April, 1940 with my elderly mother (aged 67 and almost completely blind due to a Pituitary Tumour), and my sister-in-law (suffering

¹ The text has been translated from Polish into English by Mr. and Mrs. Twardzicki, 2016.

from myocardial ischemia), together with her 3-month-old daughter. The reason for our deportation was the fact that my two brothers, as Polish Reservist Officers, were already held captive as Russian prisoners of war in Starobielsk, and were subsequently executed in Charkov (Ukraine). Because of this, we were informed that we were sentenced to 10 years of hard labour in the depths of the USSR.

After a 17-day train journey in cattle trucks, each holding 40 to 50 persons, we reached our destination, a "Sovchoz" (this being a State-owned collective farm in the former USSR): "Myn-Bulak" Farm 4, Region Ayaguz in Semipalatinsk District (Oblast), near the Mongolian border. Together with two other families (10 persons in total) we were housed in a single shack, measuring 4x4 m. Initially I was forced to work making bricks for heating out of cow's dung mixed with straw, and later we were forced to work in the fields, weeding crops.

Once I received my Medical Degree (Certificate) from Lwów University (sent to me at my request by my colleagues in Lwów), I was transferred with my family to Sergiopol, a small town nearby, where I was employed as a Doctor.

With the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and USSR, we were returned to Sovchoz and I was again made to work in the fields. On 28th August, 1941, I was released from Hard Labour, and immediately travelled south, where I secured a post as a Regional Doctor in a small town, "Stary-Guk" in the Alma-Ata Region. At the same time, I applied to join the Polish Army, being formed in Buzuluk, to serve as a Female Voluntary Aid Worker. (Author's remark: "Voluntary Female Military Medical Aid Recruit" – Pomocnicza Wojskowa Służba Kobiet, PWSK) – Figure 6.

My application was granted on 15th December, 1941, and I was posted with two qualified nursing sisters to Dzambul in the South of USSR. This was a military outpost, to whom deportees

from Eastern Poland, who survived the appallingly inhuman conditions, travelled from Siberia, Kazakhstan and other regions of the USSR to join the Polish Army, being formed by General Anders, and now regarded as Russian Allies in the war against the Nazis. Our mission was to receive, treat, and give aid to these transports of Polish deportees. The task we were faced with was unimaginably dreadful! These were not human beings, but emaciated shadows and skeletons of humanity, malnourished, starved, infested and in rags. We also had to care for families that had already arrived and were stationed in Dzambul. At the same time there was an outbreak of Epidemic Typhus, so that, in every new transport, there would be dozens of cases of Typhus fever, in need of urgent treatment and hospitalisation. Mortality rates were extremely high. In one such transport we received 43 orphaned children, their parents having died on the way. Without even the most basic provisions, medicines or dressings it was virtually impossible to offer the most basic help. By March 1942 we received some medical supplies which enabled us to offer more effective and practical help apart from just kindness and words of comfort to those poor, ill and dispossessed compatriots. Meanwhile, epidemic Typhus continued to rage, and I would be called out to a min. of 8 cases daily. Living conditions of those affected were appalling. Entire families were crammed into small, cold, damp and windowless hovels without running water or basic sanitation. Individuals were covered in rags, infested with vermin, with

Fotografia lub odcisk wskazującego palca lewej ręki

Podpis właściciela — Signatura
Dr. Kornella Helena

ARMIA POLSKA W Z. S. R. R.
POLISH ARMY IN U. S. S. R.

Legitymacja osobista
Identity Card
Удостоверение

№ 248

Stopień — Rank Ochotniczka starsza pracownica sz. Dzambul
Nazwisko — Name dr. Kornella
Imię — Christian name Helena
Miejsce i data urodz. — Place and date of birth Warszawa. 1901r.
OPIS — DESCRIPTION: Wzrost — Height 170cm
Kolor oczu — Colour of eyes szkarłata
Kolor włosów — Colour of hair brunatno

Podpis dowódcy — Signatur of Permit Officer
SZEFE SZTABU
LEOPOLD OKULICKI
PUŁK. DYPL.

Чин добровольца
Фамилия др. Ко
Имя, отчество Ели
Место рождения Варшав
Рост средний
Лицо овальное
Волосы Брюнетка
Глаза карие
Особые приметы: KB

FIGURE 6. Voluntary Female Medical Aid Recruit, 1942

no food, clothing or bedding, Hospitals were overflowing, and when a place was made available, no transport was to be had.

My family also succumbed to Typhus, with my mother dying one week and my sister-in-law the next, leaving a 2-year-old child behind. By some miracle we 3, i.e. myself and my 2 nursing colleagues and the child survived.

Now we had to deal with severe cases of malnutrition, scurvy and other vitamin deficiencies. Effective treatment was virtually impossible due to a total lack of fruit, vegetables, and wholesome nutrition in general.

On 8th August, 1942 we were moved further South-West to Yang-Yuli, from where finally, on 19 August, we began our journey south, to freedom, initially to Iran and later further afield. We travelled in lorry and bus convoys with orphaned children and the surviving families in our care” [13, 14, 20, 21].

WORKING IN IRAN (1942–1945)

The fate of Poles in the Soviet Union was completely changed in June 1941 when Germany unexpectedly attacked Russia. In need of as many allies it could find, the Soviets agreed to release all the Polish citizens it held in captivity. On 30th July, 1941 the Polish premier, General Władysław Sikorski (1881–1943) and the Soviet representative Ivan Mayski (1884–1975) signed an agreement to release all the Poles who had been arrested and deported under what was termed an “amnesty”.

Shortly afterwards, provision was also made for the creation of an army from these newly-freed prisoners. It was to be commanded by General Władysław Anders (1882–1970), recently released from the Lubyanka prison in Moscow.

Arriving at the army reception camps the refugees attempted to enlist in the Polish army. The salvation finally came when Stalin was persuaded to evacuate a fraction of the Polish forces to Iran. A small number of civilians were allowed to accompany them.

The evacuation of Polish nationals from the Soviet Union took place by sea from Krasnovodsk to Pahlevi (Anzali), and overland from Ashkabat to Mashhad.

In all, 115,000 people were evacuated, 37,000 of them civilians, 18,000 children. These made up 7% of the number of Polish citizens originally deported to the Soviet Union.

Most of the people were weakened by 2 years of starvation, hard labour and the diseases they were suffering from for a variety of conditions. 40% of patients admitted to the hospital were suffering from typhus, and most of these died within a month or two of arriving. At that time there were only 10 doctors and 25 nurses in the whole of Pahlavi camp.

Among them was Dr. Helena Kornella. In Pahlavi the hungry people could not tolerate the rich food, and a large number died purely from the results of over-eating.

After few days Dr. Kornella was sent to a Military Hospital in Tehran. At that time she held the rank of captain in the medical corps.

Without diploma of officer cadet training followed her demobilisation.

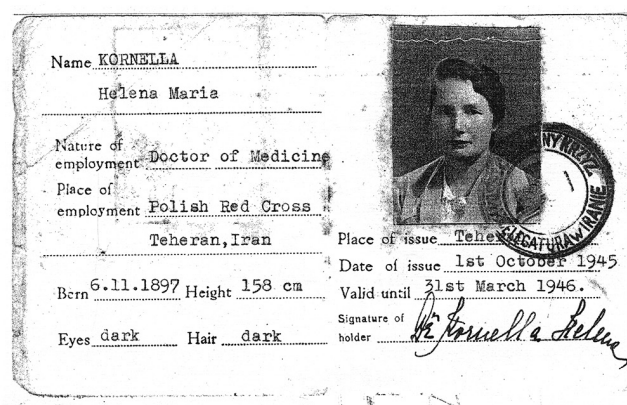


FIGURE 7. Identity Card, Polish Red Cross, Iran, 1946

She continued to work as a General Practitioner (GP) in the outpatient clinic of the Polish Red Cross in Tehran, where she took care of Polish patients (Fig. 7).

Altogether she spent three years in Tehran. In Tehran she adopted her niece Halina Maria.

One family episode is worth noting:

One day a Parsler raped small Halina. A group of Girl Scouts playing outside the refugee camp in Pahlavi noticed an Iranian caressing a blonde girl. She cried loudly. The scouts immediately informed Polish soldiers, who caught the rapist and recovered the girl. The rapist was arrested.

Tehran's five transit camps, one army and four civilian, were situated in various parts of the city. There was also a Polish hospital in the city, a hostel for the elderly, an orphanage (run by the sisters of Nazareth) and convalescent home for sick children.

By 1944, however, Iran was already emptying of Poles. They were leaving for other D.P. camps in Tanganyika, Mexico, India, New Zealand, Palestine, Lebanon and the UK. Their main exit route was Ahvaz.

In 1945, Dr. Helena Kornella together with her adoptive daughter Halina left Iran (via Isfahan) for Lebanon in one of the last military transports [22, 23, 24].

STAYING IN BEIRUT, LEBANON (1945–1950)

After a short stay in a camp at Saint Simon beach in Beirut, the newly-arrived were accommodated with Lebanese families in Christian villages around Beirut. Over five thousand Polish refugees reached Lebanon to find their safe haven. Although their colony was not more numerous compared to other nationalities, between 1943 and 1950 they built up a politically and socially recognizable group.

According to the press statement of Dr. Sigmund Zawadowski (Consul General for Lebanon and Syria, Polish Minister), issued in September 1946: “there had been approximately 4,400 refugees in Lebanon at that time: 2300 women, 700 men and 1400 children under the age of 18. Each received 12 pounds sterling from the Delegation of the Polish Social Assistance in Beirut to cover the costs of a stay in Lebanon, especially rent”.

Starting from November 1946, the refugees were taken directly under the care of the Consulate General of Great Britain, where an office for the Polish counsellor was established. Financial subsidies were managed by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), then the International Refugee Organization (IRO) and radically reduced.

However, the main reason for the Polish presence in Lebanon was related to higher education opportunities for young Polish people at well-known universities: the French Saint Joseph's University (USJ) and the American University of Beirut (AUB).

The USJ Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry organised special regime classes, between 1942 and 1947, where out of 36 students, 30 were Poles. Later, those young soldiers integrated with their military units.

At AUB students were accepted only for the full programme of at least 3 years. Women constituted 80% of the Polish students. Over a hundred Polish boys and girls were sent to the university. They were excellent students and had a splendid influence on the campus. In total, about four hundred young Polish people studied in Lebanon. Two hundred of them received diplomas [14, 25, 26].

Doctor H. Kornella lived in a private apartment belonging to an Arab family in Beirut. She worked at an outdoor clinic of the Delegation of Polish Social Assistance in Beirut and the Relief Society for Poles in Lebanon, and was active in the Beirut Polish Red Cross. There, she was responsible for patients of the Polish community in the country (Fig. 8).



FIGURE 8. IC Polish Army Welfare Personnel, 1947

In Beirut Dr. Kornella had the first possibility to prove her talent for music and singing. She gave regular concerts, mostly for Polish audiences [14, 15, 22, 25, 26].

GREAT BRITAIN

In August 1950, Dr. Kornella, with her niece (by then her formally adopted daughter), sailed from Beirut, Lebanon across the stormy seas with the military transport, arriving at Hull, Yorkshire, UK after a 10-day voyage. She stayed a few months in a transit camp. Thereafter she secured a temporary post in a Polish military hospital in Penley, North Wales.

Although Helena's medical degree was recognised by the British General Medical Council, her initially limited English language rendered finding a more advanced position in her original speciality, urology, very unlikely. By the way, she could speak and write German and French [14, 15].

Having managed to place her daughter in a Polish boarding school in Pitsford, Northampton, she took the first available post in a tuberculosis (TB) sanatorium near, close to her daughter's school [27, 28, 29].

In view of the declining demand for treatment for TB following the introduction of potent antituberculous drugs, and the ever smaller number of new cases of TB, the higher authorities decided to close this Department.

Dr. Kornella secured a position in the Geriatric Wing of a General Hospital in Birmingham, where she worked until retirement.

She retired in 1968 at the age of 71, and moved to London shortly afterwards to be close to her family. There, she helped her look after up her children, which gave her great pleasure and a continued sense of purpose; her help also enabled Dr. Halina T. to continue in full time medical practice [14, 15, 27, 28].

PRIVATE LIFE AND FAMILY

Dr. Helena Maria Kornella was not married and did not have children of her own. She adopted her niece, Halina Maria, the daughter of her younger brother Marian K.

Her adopted daughter Halina was born on 1st January, 1940 in Lwów. As a 3-month-old baby she was deported to Kazakhstan, where her mother and grandmother died. Together with her aunt, a physician of the Polish General Anders Army, they left the Soviet Union and went to Persia. She lived in Tehran for three years. In 1945 they moved to Beirut, Lebanon, where Halina started her primary education. By then she had been formally adopted.

In August 1950 Dr. Kornella and her daughter Halina moved to Hull, Yorkshire, UK. Halina was admitted to the Polish Boarding School in Pitsford, Northamptonshire where she attained her certificate (equivalent of the Polish "Matura") in 1958 [14, 15, 27, 28].

Thereafter, she gained admission to the prestigious Medical School at Birmingham University and graduated from there in 1963 (Fig. 9).

After a year of hospital practice as a junior doctor, Halina joined a general practice in Rugby, Warwicks. There she married A. Twardzicki, a graduate electrical design engineer.

The family had 3 daughters, and in 1968 they moved to London.

In London Dr. Halina Twardzicki continued in a General Practice, which she eventually took over. Later she specialised in Developmental & Community Paediatrics.

In London her husband took up a post as a lecturer in Electrical Engineering at London University, Queen Mary College.

Their three daughters graduated: two in Foreign Languages and one in Psychology. One of the daughters has two children [27].



FIGURE 9. Doctor Helena Kornella with Dr. Halina Kornella (from right), 1963

The father of Helena Michał K. (1862–1911) studied civil engineering in Vienna and was awarded his Ph.D. degree at the Lwów Polytechnic School. He worked on designing flood defences for major rivers in Poland, and on water supplies for the towns of Zakopane and Szczawnica.

Her mother, Jadwiga Sas-Hoszowska (1873–1942), was the daughter of Celestyn Hoszowski (1837–1911), Professor of art and sculpture, whose works were widely exhibited in Vienna, Rome, Cracow, Warsaw and other European cities.

Helena had three siblings; Ludwik (1902–1919), then only 17 years old, fought in defence of Lwów and was killed in 1919. Her elder brother Roman (1893–1940) completed law studies at Graz University, Austria. The outbreak of First World War interrupted his studies when he was mobilised and inducted into the Austrian army in 1914. The younger brother, Marian (1889–1940), later joined the Polish Legion of Colonel Józef Piłsudski (part of the Austrian army) as a very young volunteer.

Following demobilisation from the Austrian army in 1918, both brothers (Roman and Marian) took up service in the newly-formed Polish Army, where they remained until 1920.

After the war, Roman continued his military career, reaching the rank of major. In 1922 he married Teresa Rawisz from Budapest, Hungary. They had no children.

Marian resumed his studies and graduated in 1929 in Civil Engineering at Lvov Polytechnic.

Later he married Josepha Wozniak and the family moved to Kutno, where he worked on the prevention of floods by local rivers.

After the outbreak of the Second World War on 1st September, 1939 both brothers, Roman as a major on active service, and Marian recalled as a reservist in the rank of lieutenant, participated in fighting German and later Russian invasions. Both brothers were taken prisoners of war by the Soviets. Eventually, they met in the same POW camp in Starobielsk, from which they were transferred to Kharkov, where both were executed in April 1940 by the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, Soviet Secret Police, head: Lavrenty Beria, 1899–1953).

A mass execution of Poles took place at roughly the same time in Katyń forest, Mednoye, Kozielsk, Ostaszkow and Kharkov, where over 25,500 Polish officers, "intelligentsia", landowners and police officers were murdered (shot) by the NKVD, including 599 physician officers. Altogether, over one million more Poles were exiled to the depths of the Soviet Union (Siberia and Central Asia) [14, 15, 21, 27, 28, 29].

LAST YEARS

An accident in 1990 resulting in a hip fracture compelled Dr. Helena Kornella to move to a nursing home very close to her family. Sadly, her health gradually deteriorated and she died peacefully in her sleep on 27th May, 1992. Her ashes were deposited in the Columbarium of the Polish parish church St Andrew Bobola in Ealing, London (Fig. 10).



FIGURE 10. Columbarium Plaques, 2015

Her activity and heroic deeds during the Second World War were not forgotten. Doctor Helena Kornella was recognised and received much praise and some prestigious awards and medals, most of them by the Polish Government in Exile.

Among others, she received the Polish Army Medal for War, and the British Defence Medal [22, 23, 27, 30, 31].

EPILOGUE

The urological achievements of Dr. Helena Kornella were not of epochal importance. Yet her heroic medical activity in those very difficult and dangerous war years was very useful and important for the thousands of patients she treated. Her war activity until now has been unknown, while mostly only short notices about her have been false written: "...Helena Kornellanka was deported to Kazakhstan, where she soon after died" [11, 17].

And it is for these reasons that this outstanding urologist and internist from Lwów, and GP, deserves to be remembered. Her activity and heroic deeds during the Second World War

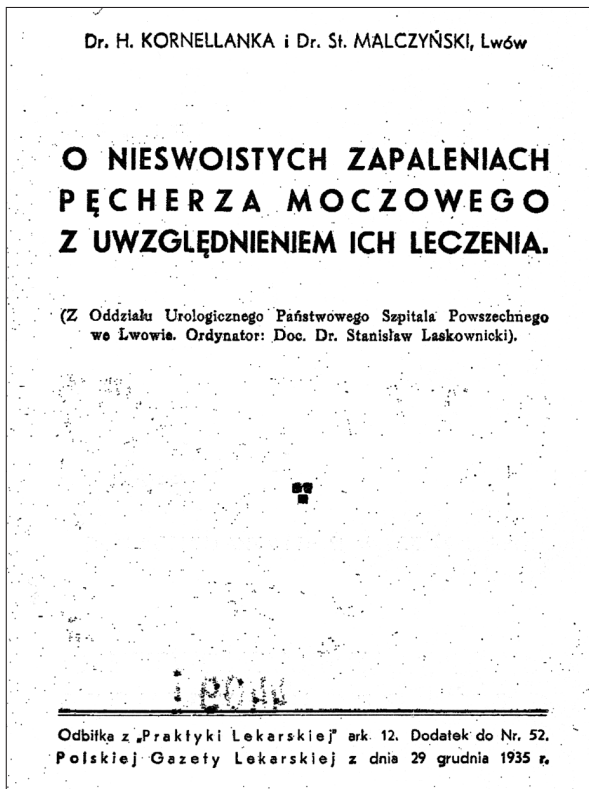


FIGURE 11. An article in "Physicians Practice", 1935

should be not forgotten. Doctor Helena Kornella was recognised and should be mentioned as the first female urologist in Poland, although she was a clinical urologist without prior surgical training or practice. Her publications were in the field of urology. In 1935, she published as "Premiere femme Urologue Pologne" the article "On unspecific inflammation of the bladder and its treatment" (Fig. 11) [8, 32].

Her engagement was a godsend for thousands of Polish refugee patients in Kazakhstan, Iran and Beirut. However, the most significant measure of her successful life is the large number of patients she treated with total dedication.

Although Dr. Kornella was a well trained urologist, she was unable to find a more advanced position in her original speciality due to war circumstances. At that time there was no separate urological department, either in the British Army or in the UK.

Only once, by accident, did she have the opportunity to use her urological skill. It took place during the 17-day train journey in a cattle truck to Kazakhstan. One elderly co-traveller had acute urinary retention with severe pains. Doctor Kornella punctured the bladder with a needle and syringes through suprapubic access and emptied the bladder. The happy, rich and grateful patient gave milk to 3-month-old Halina until the end of the journey. This donation saved the life of the baby, her niece.

Doctor Helena Kornella's inborn resilience, sheer strength of character, intense patriotism and deep faith gave her the will to survive the ordeal of "Siberia" in order to save and care for her lost brother's daughter Halina (then just 3-years-old), the only remaining member of her lost family [14, 15].

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