

# Jubilee - 75th birthday of Professor Přemysl Frič, MD, DSc.



March 31 2004 is the 75th birthday of Prof. MUDr. Přemysl Frič, DrSc., one of the most significant Czech gastroenterologists of the second half of the 20th century. Professor Frič is known both as an excellent teacher who acted as mentor to a number of Prague gastroenterologists, and as an organiser of scientific life and publishing activity in the community of this developing area.

After graduating from the Medical Faculty of Charles University in Prague in 1953, Frič started his scientific and teaching career under Professor Herfort, the Nestor of Czech gastroenterology and founder of modern digestive endoscopy in this country. In 1957 Frič presented a work on "Chromodiagnosics

and Functional Examination of the Biliary System" to obtain the scientific qualification "Candidate of Sciences". In 1969 he became senior lecturer in internal medicine, with a thesis focusing on the issue of malabsorption syndrome. His monograph covering this topic, published in 1969, was for many years the only original Czech work addressing this area and was recognised by both Czech and international audience for its quality, excellent organisation and breadth of scope. Later on, Frič, in that time still a senior lecturer, replaced Professor Herfort as Head of the Department of Internal Medicine of the University Out-patient Clinic of today's General Teaching Hospital in Prague, and transformed it into the most important centre for gastroenterology and endoscopy in Czechoslovakia. He introduced the entire spectrum of endoscopic techniques, including ERCP and later also endoscopic ultrasonography. Apart from advanced endoscopy equipment, the department had a very advanced laboratory performing a full range of laboratory diagnostics relating to gastroenterology, including functional tests which are often lacking nowadays. It was in this excellently organised, efficient department that the majority of over 400 scientific publications originated, as well as 7 monographs, many of which were published in prestigious international magazines. In 1979 Frič obtained his doctor's decree with a thesis on the issue of heterogeneity of intestinal enzymes in patients suffering with coeliac disease, and in 1983 he was appointed Professor of Medicine at Charles University. He continued to work as Head of the Department of Internal Medicine of the University Out-patient Clinic till 1998 when, after this Department merged with the 4th Department of Internal Medicine of the General Teaching Hospital, he took the position of Emeritus Professor at the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine of the Central Military Hospital in Prague, where a department of gastroenterology of the

Institute of Postgraduate Studies in Medicine had recently been established. When the Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology of the 1st Faculty of Medicine of Charles University was opened at the 2nd Department of Internal Medicine of the Central Military Hospital, Professor Frič - after a short break - resumed teaching undergraduates of our largest medical school.

The area of malabsorption was just one of the issues that Professor Frič focused on, in terms of scientific research and otherwise. The diligent and systematic approach that characterises his entire scientific career was not limited to the area of research: this was also evident when he addressed the problems of individual gastroenterologic diseases and their effects on the health of both individual patients and the general population. For this reason Professor Frič was appointed Head of the Expert Group for coeliac disease at the Ministry of Health. At this point it also becomes necessary to mention the professor's lifelong interest in colorectal tumours and the extraordinary credit he must take for the implementation of a secondary screening program for colorectal carcinoma. Two extensive studies (Frič P, Zavoral M, Dvořáková H et al. *An adapted program of colorectal cancer screening - 7-year experience and cost-benefits analysis. Hepato-Gastroenterology* 1994; 41: 413 - 416 and Frič P, Zavoral M, Čekal J et al. *Colorectal cancer screening in the present healthcare system (the Prague Project). Endoskopie* 1999; 8: 39 - 45), addressing the diagnostics of occult bleeding in stool were so well prepared that their results were sufficiently conclusive to substantiate the need to implement a screening program on a country-wide basis - and to secure an additional subsidy to expand the network of regional endoscopic centres. Implementation of the screening significantly improved the prestige of Czech gastroenterology in an international context, where Professor Frič represents the Czech Republic as an expert advisor to the WHO in the area of colorectal cancer. Here we must stress that despite his 75 years the Professor is not just a worthy recipient of local and international awards and honours; he also continues to ensure the smooth running of the program on a day-to-day basis, starting with lectures to general practitioners, training in assessing the

results and ending with complex negotiations with health insurance companies and the Ministry of Health.

Professor Frič also deserves recognition for building up an excellent endoscopy centre in the Department of Internal Medicine of the Teaching Hospital at Karlovo náměstí in Prague. Inspired by the concept of the famous Mayo hospital in Rochester, USA, he managed to build, under the conditions of socialist regime, a top-level centre, fully comparable with similar centres in Western Europe and Northern America. His interest in endoscopy and extensive personal experience was summarised in an unrivalled monograph *Digestive Endoscopy and Laparoscopic Surgery*, which he published together with Professor Ryska in 1996. The multimedia CD-Rom that was issued with the book is still a valuable source of information and example for Czech endoscopists.

Professor Frič never favoured improvisation. His experience gained during stays at renowned hospitals in the USA and Germany confirmed his opinion that good medicine cannot be performed without a systematic approach, diligence and consistent application of standard procedures in each and every diagnostic and therapeutic consideration. Perhaps because of these principles and attitudes, which he passed on to his colleagues and subordinates, and on observance of which he strictly insisted, so many of his pupils became heads of Prague hospitals and departments. Apart from the author of this contribution, let us mention at least Dr. Zádorová, Dr. Špičák, Dr. Keil and Dr. Doseděl.

The fame of Professor Frič as measured by contemporary criteria is obvious - if we input the word "Frič" in the Google search engine, we can see that the majority of links are to Professor Frič and his medical activities. The traveller A. V. Frič, who is no less renowned, takes second place.

In the years to come we wish Professor Frič, a man of extraordinary knowledge and focus both medical and cultural, both the good health and the enthusiasm that his demanding vocation requires.

Ad multos annos!

Associate Professor Miroslav Zavoral