

Comment

Rheumatology constantly is perceived in an erroneous fashion, and it is considered in a wrong way that does not correspond with the facts and is based on a traditional view on the specialty as it was a half century ago. The view may be supported by many examples like consideration of all patients with rheumatic diseases as elderly individuals only or application of determination of ASO titer as a highly applicable rheumatological index.

Writing about contemporary rheumatology, I do not want to abuse the lofty words although such descriptions like “a golden age of rheumatology” have been presented by several rheumatologists. These utterances are probably exaggerated but they indicate the significance of the changes that have happened in the management of some inflammatory diseases as well as for widening of diagnostic possibilities. A number of these problems are reviewed in papers by leading Polish rheumatologists collected in two issues of “Postępy Nauk Medycznych” (“Progress in Medicine”). The first part of the reviews appeared in the supplement no 2 that was printed in 2011 and remaining articles were published in the present issue. All papers were written in honor of my sixtieth birthday and were dedicated to me. It is a great honor to me as well as a source of joy, and I wish to express my cordial thanks to all the authors.

Professor Stefan Mackiewicz reviews the development of rheumatology in historical perspective. He described our past and discussed how much tasks are in front of us, both scientific and clinical. “The time factor” remains of great importance in patients with inflammatory disorders. It means diagnosis of these diseases should be made as early as possible and early beginning of treatment allows reduction of the inflammatory process, which in turn results in damage of the musculoskeletal system, systemic manifestations and shortening of the patients’ life. This problem is discussed in papers of Professor Anna Filipowicz-Sosnowska (early rheumatoid arthritis) and Professor Piotr Wiland (early diagnosis of seronegative spondyloarthropathies). Diagnostics is reviewed in papers on imaging techniques by Professor Małgorzata Wiśłowska (co-author: Dr Magdalena Matryba) and on determination of autoantibodies by Professor Mariusz Puszczewicz (co-author: Dr Grażyna Białkowska-Puszczewicz).

Pain is the main symptom and is a factor causing that patients are going to see the doctor. Treatment of pain in rheumatology is a subject of the paper by Professor Witold Tłustochowicz (co-author: Dr Dariusz Niedziałek). A holistic view on patients with chronic disorders, including musculoskeletal diseases is described in the paper on psychological problems in patients with rheumatic diseases by Professor Anna Jędryka-Góral (co-author: Dr Ida Dobrucka).

We are pleased with a continuous progress in medical knowledge and widening of clinical possibilities but medicine always has taught us the humility of the complexity of structure and functioning of the human body. Problems to be solved are numerous in rheumatology. Moreover, the level of “uncertainty” seems to be higher in rheumatology than in other medical subspecialties. “The level of uncertainty” is considered as difficulties in making a correct diagnosis and determination of the patients’ clinical situation. Any new medication has not been registered for management of patients with systemic lupus erythematosus for a long time. Some hopes are associated with belimumab. Therapeutic strategy for patients with systemic lupus erythematosus, a mysterious and difficult to treat disease is reviewed by Professor Maria Majdan (co-author: Dr Dorota Suszek, Dr Andrzej Majdan). Systemic sclerosis is also a very mysterious, severe and incurable disorder. Professor Otylia Kowal-Bielecka discusses management of pulmonary hypertension, a severe and life-threatening complication occurring in some patients with systemic sclerosis (co-author: Żaneta Smoleńska). Vascular involvement in patients with systemic sclerosis and other systemic connective tissue diseases may manifest as Raynaud’s phenomenon. Treatment of patients with Raynaud’s phenomenon and microcirculation disturbances is described in the paper of Professor Anna Kuriliszyn-Moskal (co-authors: Dr Jacek Kita, Dr Agnieszka Dakowicz). The other article on a similar subject, i.e. diagnostic application of capillaroscopy appeared in the supplement. Rare syndromes including SAPHO syndrome and Henoch-Schönlein purpura are reviewed by Professor Marek Brzosko (co-authors: Dr Hanna Przepiera-Będzak, Dr Lech Cyryłowski, Dr Iwona Brzosko, Dr Piotr Zorga) and Professor Piotr Adrian Klimiuk (co-author: Professor Anna Kuriliszyn-Moskal), respectively. A paper by Professor Piotr Leszczyński (co-authors: Dr Katarzyna Pawlak-Buś, Dr Tomasz Szafranski) on the adult-onset Still disease as a cause of fever of unknown origin belongs to the same group of articles. Progress in management of inflammatory disorders is easy to recognize in rheumatology but treatment of so-called soft tissue rheumatism remains a great clinical difficulty. Dr Magdalena Atarowska and Professor Włodzimierz Samborski review fibromyalgia, a most common disease from the group of soft tissue rheumatic disorders.

Children also suffer from rheumatic diseases, and we do not always become aware of this fact. Pediatric rheumatology, i.e. rheumatic fever is a subject of the paper of Professor Lidia Rutkowska-Sak (co-authors: Dr Izabela Szczygielska, Dr Elżbieta Hernik, Dr Ewa Jednacz) that appeared in the supplement.

It is worth mentioning remaining papers published in the supplement. Professor Jacek Szechiński reviews biologics, the main new therapeutic tool introduced into rheumatology in the last decade. Other topics described in the supplement include acute phase reactants (Dr Izabela Korczowska, Professor Paweł Hrycaj, Professor Jan K. Łacki), polymyositis and dermatomyositis (Professor Hanna Chwalińska-Sadowska, Dr Paweł Mielnik), gout and pseudogout (Professor Irena Zimmermann-Górska), non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (Professor Jacek Pazdur), renal manifestations in patients with systemic connective tissue diseases (Professor Zbigniew Zdrojewski). Professor Leszek Szczepański comprehensively reviews management of patients with osteoarthritis, a problem important and interesting to each rheumatologist.

Medicine always is oriented on the whole, individual human being. I commonly repeat this statement both in discussions on narrow subspecialties and conversations on aims of medicine and organization of health service. Rheumatology emerged from internal medicine and currently it has been bringing closer to internal medicine. Rheumatologist treats, after all, the whole patients with his/her co-morbidities and other conditions; rheumatologist is not “a doctor for the bones and joints only”. Profound education of rheumatologists in internal medicine is indispensable for performing their professional duties. I am convinced that the papers in two issues of “Progress in Medicine” contain a number of problems indicating for complexity and wide range of rheumatology as a part of internal medicine.

Once again, I thank to all the authors for their kindness in writing papers in honor of me. I am also very thankful to Professor Ryszard Brzozowski and the publishing house “Borgis” for possibility to publish the papers as well as I extend my thanks to Dr Anna Kotulska for writing detailed and so friendly to me afterword. I do hope that presentation of contemporary rheumatology will disclose the current face of the subspecialty and facilitate better understanding and solving of clinical problems of our patients.

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