



“Dialysis patients always first!”

Aleksandar Sikole (1954-2021)

The nephrology community grieves for Professor Aleksandar Sikole MD, who passed away in the University Hospital in Skopje, Northern Macedonia at the age of 67. Aleksandar Sikole was born on January 30th, 1954 in Skopje and died on March 24, 2021 after having acutely suffered from a severe brain cancer. The nephrological community expresses its deep sympathy with his wife Greta and daughters Magdalena and Emilija. His patients, peers, and colleagues will miss a passionate physician and thorough clinical scientist with a wide recognition in the realm of hemodialysis and nephrology.

Aleksandar graduated at the Medical Faculty of University Kiril i Metodij of Skopje and received an MD degree in 1980. His further education at the Health Department of Skopje in the Emergency Unit was dedicated to internal medicine with a focus on nephrology and joined the Department of Nephrology, Medical Faculty, Skopje, in the unit for dialysis and renal transplantation in 1986.

The early 1990ies were the time, when the situation of dialysis patients was greatly improved due to the availability of recombinant “erythropoietin”. It had a large impact on the “quality of life” of kidney patients. Together with his mentor Prof. Dr. Momir Polenakovic, Aleksandar realized his paradigm “Dialysis patients always first” by participating successfully in the first European clinical trial for receiving approval of recombinant EPO. The Skopje clinic was one of 36 European clinical centres and the only one in the former Eastern bloc. Main findings of the Skopje study were that rEPO did not only positively affect the blood system and haematocrit in dialysis patients but also improved cardiac performance. Problems, however, arose later, when and as a consequence of a trade embargo to Macedonia due to political reasons, rEPO was unavailable in this country. A clinical follow-up of patients without access to rEPO performed by Aleksandar showed that cardiac sequelae worsened and reoccurred. Later in 1994, he obtained a PhD degree with a thesis entitled “The effect of erythropoietin therapy on the heart and bone marrow of patients on maintenance haemodialysis.” and in 2001 he was elected Associate Professor of Internal Medicine.

Apart from EPO and anaemia, other highly valued scientific contributions came from A. Sikole. Clinical investigations and publications on hypertension, cardiomyopathy, renal osteodystrophy, infection with Hepatitis C, diabetes, AGE-proteins and uraemic toxins in uraemia showed his multifaceted interest and experience in clinical nephrology. As Professor of Medicine of the Medical Faculty, University of Skopje in 2006, and later Director of the University Nephrology Hospital of Skopje, he shared his knowledge and practical experience by participating in a series of further international clinical trials on EPO-use and on phosphate binders, such as lanthanum carbonate.

We all never forget the splendid organisation and performance of the 37. Annual Congress of ESAO from Sept 8-11, 2010 in Skopje, Macedonia, when A. Sikole, also as Board member of ESAO, served as organizer of the congress. The meeting took place in the building of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences in Skopje. All participants were impressed by the perfect organization, by the beautiful location of the Macedonian capital of Skopje in between the mountains and the warm and generous hospitality of the host.

Aleksandar was not only a good scientist. He engaged himself in both healthcare politics and political affairs always having in mind his motto "Dialysis patients always first!" JV never forgets an intense controversial discussion with him where advantages and disadvantages of privatizing dialysis centres were addressed and when Aleksandar doubted that a for-profit system, such as private dialysis centres, would favour the health of dialysis patients.

With a sabbatical performed at Laiko Hospital in Athens, he wanted to facilitate discussions between neighbouring countries with the help of science and help to overcome the diplomatic troubles on a lower level between the - at that time called - "Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYRM) and Greece. As a collaborator of Dr. Christos Stathakis who later served as President of the Balkan City Association for Nephrology, Transplantation and Artificial Organs (BANTAO), he was an active member of the BANTAO organisation.

Finally and not to be forgotten, Prof. Sikole supported his young fellow students by stimulating them to perform sabbaticals in foreign countries. When these students returned home, he urged them to vitalize his concept for "Dialysis patients always first". In a collaboration between Skopje University and Groningen University clinical in the Netherlands with Prof. G. Rakhorst, a study on skin autofluorescence was performed. As a result, Sikole et al., were able to show that AGE-modified proteins could be detected easily and non-invasively in the skin.

We will all miss Aleksandar Sikole not only as a good and thorough scientist and a caring physician, but also as a friend with a high dedication to mutual scientific collaboration across borders and for his impressive hospitality.

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