

80 Years of the Faculty of Medicine in Hradec Králové

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Last year marked 80 years since Edvard Beneš, President of the Czechoslovak Republic, signed a decree establishing the medical faculty in Hradec Králové as a branch of the Faculty of Medicine at Charles University in Prague. This was the beginning of medical education in the city and the wider East Bohemian region.

The decision to establish the faculty here was no coincidence.

For centuries, Hradec Králové was an important fortified town in the Austrian Empire, and all aspects of life in the town and its surroundings were subordinated to this fact. This situation lasted until the end of the 19th century, when the fortress was dismantled. It was only after this that the town and region underwent rapid development, a process that continued during the First Republic.

The region's development led to a sharp increase in population, creating a need for better, more accessible healthcare. Thanks to the significant support and efforts of city officials, one of the largest and most modern hospitals in what was then Czechoslovakia was built. This hospital employed a number of leading experts who, in addition to their high level of professional expertise and medical experience, were also actively involved in lecturing, publishing and social activities.

The region therefore possessed a high level of personnel, professional and material readiness to support a medical faculty. Its possible establishment was therefore discussed throughout the interwar period as part of the efforts to establish a university in Hradec Králové – or rather, a regional university in East Bohemia. However,

this process was halted for six long years by a significant historical event: the occupation of the republic and its subjugation as the Protectorate as part of the German Reich.

The desperate shortage of doctors after the liberation in 1945 increased the urgency to open a medical faculty as soon as possible. The closure of universities during the occupation, violent deaths on the battlefield, in concentration and labour camps, the post-war displacement of the German population and waves of emigration all contributed to the critical shortage of physicians. Given these circumstances, it was only logical that the city of Hradec Králové was chosen to establish a medical faculty shortly after the war ended. Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the government, the Ministry, the district and municipal authorities, representatives of higher education and leading physicians at the Hradec Králové hospital, the city became a university town 80 years ago when a branch of the Medical Faculty of Charles University was established there.

However, the beginnings were not easy. Besides having access to the state-of-the-art hospital, the school also needed adequate facilities for teaching basic theoretical subjects and high-quality teaching materials. The need for teaching facilities was resolved thanks to the opportunity to use a modern building on Šimkova Street. Built just before the war for the command corps of the Czechoslovak army, the building was seized and used by the Germans for other, more sinister purposes during the occupation. Adapting it for medical teaching was challenging, but hard work and enthusiasm resolved this issue relatively

quickly. Leading physicians, scientists and respected experts became involved in managing individual departments and organising teaching. The level of interest in studying medicine was huge, and the teaching was of a very high standard, at the cutting edge. The faculty soon became a respected and recognised institution.

The escalation of the international political situation in the 1950s, coupled with the world's division into irreconcilable camps, led to a rapid increase in armaments, expansion of individual armies, and a simultaneous need to bolster the ranks of military doctors. In response to political demands, the Faculty of Medicine in Hradec Králové was transformed into the Military Medical Academy in 1951. Alongside a partial change in the content of teaching and research, this resulted in significant personnel changes within various departments. Unfortunately, as a result of this transformation, a number of doctors who did not wish to become professional soldiers left the faculty. However, it should be noted that despite all the political and personnel complications, the academy's professional level remained high.

Another significant milestone in the history of the Hradec Králové faculty was its return to the civilian sector in 1958, which led to the establishment of an independent Faculty of Medicine at Charles University. Basic theoretical, preclinical and clinical disciplines developed dynamically in line with the needs of modern times, and this was later supported by the opportunity to cooperate with foreign countries thanks to the partial easing of the political situation at that time. Unfortunately, the so-called 'normalisation' of the 1970s hit our entire society hard, including our faculty. Political purges led to severe staff shortages at virtually all workplaces, paralysing the development of the faculty for a long time. Recovery was slow, and the negative impact was evident for a long time.

Fundamental changes occurred following the revolutionary societal changes of 1989. Academic values were reinstated, and democratic traditions in higher education were revived. Management of the faculty and university was based on new principles, and development of individual fields, departments, institutes and clinics was no longer politically restricted. Since then, there has been noticeable and sustained positive development.

Teaching has also changed significantly thanks to modern teaching methods and programmes, sophisticated aids, computer technology and the internet. However, the most important thing that has remained unchanged since the beginnings of our faculty is the role of the teacher. Their experience, knowledge of the subject and personal approach, enabling the traditional transfer of acquired knowledge from generation to generation, remains as important as ever.

The Faculty of Medicine currently offers degree programmes in General Medicine, Dentistry, General Nursing and Midwifery. These programmes are taught in Czech and, for hundreds of foreign students, in English. The

faculty also offers doctoral programmes. A total of almost 2,000 students are currently enrolled at the faculty.

However, teaching is not the only role of a modern medical faculty. Science and research are also integral to the faculty's activities as world-class research into a wide range of biomedical issues is carried out.

Adequate conditions are also necessary to support all faculty activities. This is why the faculty now offers modern facilities that are ideal for teaching medicine and conducting research. These facilities are located in a carefully renovated building on Šimkova Street and in the historic Na Hradě building, as well as in study areas at individual university hospital departments. In addition, new complexes have been gradually constructed. These include a teaching centre on the grounds of the Faculty Hospital and a joint campus for the medical and pharmaceutical faculties nearby. Completing these is now one of our most important tasks. The planned opening this year will create new opportunities for our students and staff. If all goes according to plan, the 2026/27 academic year will begin in the new premises.

Throughout its existence, the Faculty of Medicine has worked closely with the University Hospital in Hradec Králové. Cooperation between the two institutions is essential and is conducted on a consistently high professional level, with mutual respect. After all, the Faculty of Medicine cannot exist without its hospital, just as the University Hospital cannot exist without its faculty. Without a balanced and functional connection between the two, it would not be possible to fulfill their missions. And the University Hospital in Hradec Králové, which is now one of the largest and most modern hospitals in the country, is the main base for the practical training of our students.

We also successfully cooperate with other contracted hospitals in our country when it comes to providing practical training. Our students have the opportunity to work at these facilities during their vacation and pre-exam internships.

However, the Faculty of Medicine is more than just buildings. First of all, it is the people who work there and the students who study there that make it what it is, today as in previous years. It is the people who founded it and built it together over the decades. Leading experts, doctors, scientists and teachers. Outstanding students and graduates.

The Faculty of Medicine in Hradec Králové has undergone a long and complex journey. During that time, it has become one of the most modern educational and scientific institutions, enjoying high prestige. An integral, solid and indispensable part of Charles University, it has its own specific character and independence, and cooperates with other medical faculties.

Our history binds us together, and we are facing one of the most challenging tasks ahead. We must maintain the current high level of our faculty, whose foundations were laid 80 years ago, and continue to develop its mission, and all its responsibilities in the coming decades.