

On the Occasion of the 80th Anniversary of the Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Hradec Králové

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Last autumn we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Hradec Králové. A number of events were held and several publications were released, including a special issue of the *Časopis lékařů českých* entirely dedicated to this anniversary and to the faculty. At the ceremonial assembly of the academic community on 8 October 2025, the dean of the faculty, Professor Mandák, delivered an extensive speech in which he clearly described the historical circumstances of the faculty's foundation, its beginnings, development, and growth through various stages up to the present day.

Despite the many difficulties and changes related to both international and domestic political developments and the broader social climate over the past eight decades, the faculty has consistently fulfilled its main missions in student education, research, and scientific work. Outstanding physicians, teachers, and researchers have worked and continue to work here. Over the course of a demanding 80-year journey, the faculty has evolved into a modern educational and scientific research institution respected both nationally and internationally.

Throughout this development – one that was not always without challenges – an important role was played by the

exceptionally supportive environment and conditions created by the authorities of the city of Hradec Králové and the entire East Bohemian region. Even before the faculty itself was established after the end of the Second World War, efforts had been made to build a regional university. The critical shortage of physicians after the war, together with the possibility of utilizing a well-functioning modern hospital staffed by many top specialists in Hradec Králové, were among the main reasons for choosing this city.

The excellent cooperation between the district hospital (later the University Hospital), the faculty, and the municipal and regional authorities has historically been one of the valuable attributes of mutual collaboration – something not entirely common elsewhere in the country. The spirit of interdisciplinary cooperation in Hradec Králové was further strengthened in 1969 with the establishment of the Faculty of Pharmacy of the university.

In this article we would also like to recall another unique and very important characteristic of the Hradec Králové Faculty of Medicine. Within the framework of interministerial cooperation, it prepares – as the only institution in former Czechoslovakia and now in the Czech Republic – prepares physicians for the needs of the Czech

Armed Forces, within a joint study programme with the Military Medical Faculty of the University of Defence. This extremely significant and today highly relevant role represents a unique chapter and a distinctive feature in the faculty's history.

At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, the international situation deteriorated with the emergence of two political-military blocs and the threat of a new conflict, potentially involving nuclear weapons. In order to ensure the country's defence capability, the armed forces expanded, but they faced a post-war shortage of professional military physicians. This situation created an objective need to establish an independent military medical university.

By Order of the President of the Republic No. 247, the Military Medical Academy (VLA) was established on 15 August 1951, and from 1955 it bore the name of Jan Evangelista Purkyně. After analysing several possibilities, Hradec Králové was selected – specifically its young medical faculty with its progressive orientation. The rapid establishment of the academy was possible only because it was built on the basis of the Faculty of Medicine of Charles University, including both its theoretical and clinical departments, which enjoyed an excellent reputation thanks to their staff. Most of these staff members became members of the academy. Among them were professors Baštecký, Hybášek, Janoušek, Krákora, Santholzer, Vanýsek, Vávra, Vavrda, and Vrtiš serving as officers in high ranks, as well as Bedrna, Blecha, Dvořák, Fingerland, and Lukl as civilian employees. These outstanding personalities became renowned representatives of their disciplines and contributed to the high quality of Hradec Králové and Czechoslovak medicine in education, clinical practice, and research. The Military Medical Academy, with its 40 departments and its own clinical hospital, became an educational and scientific centre and gained a strong reputation both domestically and internationally.

With the easing of international tensions and changes in domestic political conditions, further transformations in the status, organisation, and structure of this military medical institution followed. On 30 June 1958, the academy was dissolved and replaced by the Military Medical Research and Postgraduate Training Institute of J. E. Purkyně (VLVDÚ JEP). The Faculty of Medicine returned to civilian administration under the Ministry of Education as part of Charles University, and the clinical hospital was reintegrated into the civilian structure of the Ministry of Health. The main tasks of the VLVDÚ focused on research and postgraduate training and specialization of military physicians and pharmacists.

Under interministerial agreements, the undergraduate education of future military physicians continued at the restored civilian Faculty of Medicine of Charles University. Military students therefore complete the full curriculum of general medicine or dentistry, while additionally undergoing training in military-professional subjects, practical training in a vivarium or on simulators, and field exercises. In 1988, the institute was renamed again as the Military Medical Academy of J. E. Purkyně (VLA JEP).

Like the civilian Faculty of Medicine, the institution entered a completely new stage of development

after November 1989. It underwent a transformation that significantly changed its military educational programmes, organisational structure, and staffing. With the establishment of the University of Defence of the Czech Republic, the school continued its activities from 1 September 2004 under the name Faculty of Military Health Sciences of the University of Defence (FVZ UO). On 1 January 2025, it was renamed once again to its current title: Military Medical Faculty of the University of Defence (VLF UO).

Today the Military Medical Faculty enters the third decade of its modern existence as a unique educational and scientific institution linking medicine, defence, and the state's security community. Its main mission is to prepare military and civilian healthcare professionals – physicians, dentists, pharmacists, and paramedics – capable of operating in a rapidly changing security environment, ranging from crisis situations and mass-casualty events to foreign missions, telemedicine, and modern threats associated with infectious diseases or hybrid conflicts. The faculty fulfils its mission through high-quality education, research, and professional expertise. Modern study programmes combine classical medicine with fields essential for military healthcare, including emergency medicine, epidemiology, toxicology, preventive medicine, radiation protection, and the specifics of field medical support. This enables the preparation of professionals capable of providing care not only in standard conditions but also in resource-limited, high-risk environments requiring rapid decision-making.

At the same time, the faculty plays a significant role in scientific research. Its departments focus systematically on infectious diseases, vaccinology, crisis management, military surgery, internal medicine, hygiene, toxicology, and radiobiology. The results of this work have practical impacts on both military and civilian healthcare systems, improving preparedness and contributing to innovations in prevention and health protection.

Today the significance of the faculty extends beyond the defence sector. Through its activities, it contributes to societal resilience, the development of professional knowledge, and the training of a new generation of physicians and healthcare professionals who combine professionalism, responsibility, and public service. Another future goal is to initiate the education and training of military nurses (general nursing). At a time when healthcare and security systems face growing challenges, the role of the Military Medical Faculty is clear: to be a stable pillar of expertise, a source of highly qualified professionals, and a guarantor that healthcare and health protection in both the armed forces and civilian sector will meet the needs of the present and the future.

Looking back at the 80-year history of the Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Hradec Králové and the 75-year history of the Military Medical Faculty in Hradec Králové, it is evident how many things have changed and evolved in response to international political developments and the circumstances of the time. What can be stated with pride, however, is that the coexistence and close, mutually supportive cooperation between these two “sister” faculties has become beneficial and unique

example of mutually collaboration in medical education, science, and research.

The close integration of working teams, shared clinical workplaces, and joint activities in research and science – together with collegial and personal friendships often extending beyond formal interministerial agreements – runs like a red thread throughout the entire history of both institutions. This project linking a civilian and a military faculty is regarded as an exemplary model in military higher education, not only in the Czech Republic but also abroad.

Through the cooperation of both institutions, nearly three thousand military physicians and other military healthcare professionals have already been trained for the Czech Armed Forces. This long-standing collaboration between the ministries of education, health, and defence therefore contributes significantly to meeting the healthcare and defence needs of our country.

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