

# Eulogy: Professor Milan Šamánek, DrSc, FESC (\*09.05.1931 †29.04.2020) – legend from the East

Jan Marek<sup>1</sup> , Jan Janoušek<sup>2</sup> and Stanislav Tůma<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Heart & Lung Unit, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children and Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences University College London, London, UK and <sup>2</sup>Children's Heart Centre, University Hospital Motol, Prague, Czech Republic

## Letter to the Editor

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**Author for correspondence:** Professor Jan Marek, PhD, FESC, Heart & Lung Unit, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, Great Ormond Street, WC1 3JH London, UK.  
Tel: +44(0)2074059200.  
E-mail: [jan.marek@gosh.nhs.uk](mailto:jan.marek@gosh.nhs.uk)

### Abstract

This article is to commemorate and celebrate achievements of Professor Milan Šamánek who passed away on 29 April, 2020. Milan was an excellent and visionary paediatric cardiologist who helped to establish paediatric cardiology as a speciality in Czechoslovakia and several other east European countries in the late 1970s. Milan was also paramount for connecting the East and West, helping in no small way to establish the Association for European Paediatric Cardiology (AEPC) as the leading learned society in Europe.



We are saddened to write that Professor Milan Šamánek passed away peacefully on 29 April, 2020 at the age of 88 years. This is a big loss for his family and for us as his colleagues and friends.

Milan was an excellent paediatric cardiologist, a strategic thinker, and a visionary who was brilliant, innovative, and creative. As such, he was instrumental in the development of paediatric cardiology as a new speciality in Czechoslovakia in the seventh decade of the 20th century, the time of darkness under the communistic regime imposed by Soviet dictatorship. Despite all the difficulties of the time, Milan succeeded in completing his first vision. He tailored the speciality of paediatric cardiology for the needs of the national health care system in what was then Czechoslovakia by creating a single centre of excellence in Prague, the University Motol Hospital, with a network of peripheral paediatric services. Milan was the one who introduced, in the late 1970s, a new subspecialty to the World, namely, the paediatrician with an interest in paediatric cardiology. Milan was also paramount for connecting the East and West, helping in no small way to establish the Association for European Paediatric Cardiology (AEPC) as the leading learned society in Europe; another of his visions to be fulfilled. Around the same time, yet another of his visions became reality. The investment in non-invasive cardiac imaging, and cardiac ultrasound in particular, has helped immeasurably in improving outcomes of critically ill babies by early prenatal scanning and by avoiding unnecessary invasive cardiac catheterisation and angiography prior to necessary cardiac operations. Needless to say, the associated reduction in costs helped to rationalise medical care and was highly appreciated by the providers of health care at that time. The initiation and formal implementation, in 1986, of prenatal screening for cardiac malformations was one of very first national screening programs worldwide. Milan's research interests covered large areas of paediatric cardiology. His epidemiologic studies are highly cited even today.

Milan received numerous awards. He gave the Mannheimer lecture during the annual conference of the Association for European Paediatric Cardiology in 1999. In 2010, Professor Šamánek was the proud recipient of the First Grade of the Medal of Merit, awarded by the President of the Czech Republic.

Milan will remain in our hearts as one of the godfathers of paediatric cardiology. He was a visionary personality, an excellent researcher, and a brilliant teacher. He will also be remembered as a friend with a big heart and love for wine. Our thoughts go out to his children Svatava and Milan jr. and to his beloved partner Zuzana at this very difficult time. We know many of his colleagues are equally deeply affected by his loss.

*I really admired Milan. He negotiated so brilliantly through all those difficult years before Prague spring, coming West to exchange information, and introducing us to wonderful Prague and those colleagues behind the iron curtain. To me personally he was an inspiration to triumph over adversity, as he did with his own health. Milan helped me considerably with the first World Congress. I valued greatly his friendship and inspiration.*

**Professor Jane Somerville**

*I first met Milan when he attended one of the courses we organised on behalf of the British Council in Cambridge. He was obviously in a league of his own, so for the next course, held in Windsor, he was invited as a member of the faculty. Over subsequent years, he*

*became a close friend. He was a wonderful individual, with all the attributes of intellectual capability and organisational powers. To have achieved all he did in the situation in which he worked is the more amazing. We will miss him greatly.*

**Professor Robert H. Anderson**

*Milan was an absolutely wonderful man and a great friend. I still remember his warm welcome at the meeting of the Association for Paediatric Cardiology held in Prague, and I value greatly the subsequent interactions with him over the years. He was a genuine, friendly, and committed paediatric cardiologist.*

**Professor Shak Qureshi**

*I met Milan several times, in Prague at meeting of the Association for European Paediatric Cardiology, and during the British Council course in Windsor. I took a liking of him directly. During the Windsor week, we enjoyed paediatric cardiology and nice relaxed afternoons in Windsor and around. He was a great profile, and a cornerstone of European Paediatric Cardiology for decades. He will always be remembered by the members of the European Association.*

**Professor Katarina Hanseus (the AEPC chair)**