

**In Memoriam Zdravko Reno Vlahčević
(1931–2000)**

Dr Zdravko Reno Vlahčević died on July 20, 2000, in Richmond, VA, USA, at age 69. We lost a great scientist and dear friend, whose life path depicts the destinies of so many other Croats who emigrated to foreign countries. Dr Vlahčević achieved a top scientific career in the United States of America, formed there a beautiful and happy family, and never ceased to love Croatia. But, since neither he nor his countrymen could find a way in which Croatia would benefit from a distinguished researcher and physician, as USA did, he has, in a manner of speaking, died as a foreigner to both his homelands.

I am not sure whether we, who have not emigrated, as well as those who have, will ever learn how to establish a fruitful collaboration. Look what a man Croatia has lost this time.

Dr Vlahčević emigrated to the United States in 1959, and since 1966 has worked in Richmond as the chief of gastroenterology in the Veterans Administration Hospital, the position he held until his death. He also joined the Medical College of Virginia, where he became the professor of medicine in 1964. He became the Chairman of Division of Gastroenterology in 1979, and Associate Chairman for Research in the Department of Internal Medicine. He has been director of the Liver Center since 1995. For his research in bile acid and cholesterol metabolism he received Adolf Windhaus International Award (1994) and the Distinguished Scholar Award (1999). The Presidential Medallion honored his outstanding contribution to the University community. He trained over 170 gastroenterologists and countless interns and residents. He brought to his hospital more than 16 million dollars in research grants, and published some 370 research papers. He served in 80 positions as a visiting professor throughout the world – never in

Croatia. In addition to hundreds of other functions he served, he was a member of the international advisory board for the *Archives of Gastroenterohepatology* and a member of the Editorial Board of the *Croatian Medical Journal*.

He contributed significantly to our better understanding of liver's filtration system for removing cholesterol from the blood, and how cholesterol affects the formation of gall stones. His work helped in the development of the first oral dissolution therapy for gall stones.

I met Dr Vlahčević in 1994 in Opatija at the meeting of the World Association of Croatian Physicians. Impressed by his scientific achievements and charmed by his warmth and good naturedness, I did everything I could to connect him with Croatian leading gastroenterologists, Zagreb School of Medicine, the *Croatian Medical Journal*, and the homeland. Nothing worked: his lecture at the School was attended by three (me included) physicians, and on top of it, his documents were lost and the procedure to elect him a visiting professor was not even started. He reviewed only two papers for the *Croatian Medical Journal*, but did it brilliantly, and then his side of the wire fell silent. None of the contacts he gave me responded to my calls, and none of the contacts I gave him received any. I have learned of his death ten months after he died.

The sorrow I feel for the loss of a friend, a scientist, and a collaborator is great; it is even greater for all what we could have achieved had he not died; but my greatest sorrow is for Croatia, for us who were unable to transform our feelings in concrete actions.

Matko Marušić