

THE SPIRIT OF PROFESSOR IACOB IACOBOVICI IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN DENTISTRY AND MAXILLOFACIAL SURGERY

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Abstract

Founder of the Surgical Clinic in Cluj-Napoca and of Medical Education in Romanian, Rector of Dacia Superior University, Professor Iacob Iacobovici was one of the outstanding medical personalities in the first half of the twentieth century, in Romania. His scientific contributions have been recognized by the European great personalities of his time. A remarkable bright mind, with an overarching comprehension of things, Professor Iacob Iacobovici contributed, in an essential way, to the diversification of surgical education, stimulating the emergence of new specialties.

This paper illustrates the contribution of Professor Iacob Iacobovici to the development of Education of Dentistry and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery in Romania as well as his support for the Romanian Society of Dentistry.

Keywords: Iacob Iacobovici, dentistry, maxillofacial surgery

In order to be able to advocate a thing, a fact, an action, one has to be convinced of its utility or value. Consequently, first of all, it is necessary to have the understanding, to have that particular sparkle in one's spirit, that enlightens the mind revealing the mystery contained in that thing, fact or action.

Professor Iacob Iacobovici was gifted by God with that sparkle that helped him see, discern, or perceive the essential, the evolution, and/or the ultimate purpose of things. In support of this assertion are his accomplishments, which as early as his academic activity, announced the emergence of an unusual spirit. In 1901, as a freshman out of the "The Association of Civilian Hospitals in Bucharest" (a non-profit organization) he was awarded the Hillel prize for his important study *"The causes of early childhood mortality in Romania and the means to prevent it"*, a topic proposed by the Faculty of Medicine. This was a work of visibility used by sociologists and those who have dealt with the demographic studies [1].

Four years later, in his PhD Thesis, *"The Foetal Arteriology"*, he brought extremely valuable contributions which were noted by European medical celebrities and was praised by Waldayer, the renowned German professor.

Demonstrating talents not only as a scientist, anatomist, surgeon, but also as an organizer, the Romanian Government trusted him with the management of the Health Mission in the Balkan War of 1912-1913, in Bulgaria. At the end of the war, the Bulgarian Government sent its Romanian counterpart a more than laudatory letter, highlighting the great performance of the Romanian Health Mission in the theatre of operations.

During this mission, he was most impressed by the soldiers with maxillofacial wounds. Afterwards, referring to the need for an institutionalized education system in dentistry in Romania, the great surgeon and professor, Iacob Iacobovici, declared: *"During the Balkan War, I had the chance to really appreciate the importance of a dentistry education. Among the many wounded that I cared for, those who impressed me more were the ones with face injuries, particularly those with jaw wounds. The field hospital where I was assigned in the beginning, only allowed us to perform summary care, in preparation for transportation of the wounded. Later on, I worked at an evacuation hospital, so I could follow up for a longer period of time the evolution of those mutilated, for whom we could only give minimal medical help. As a professor in Cluj, I had the opportunity to cooperate with Gheorghe Bilaşcu, who was a surgeon and professor in the field of dentistry. Those who were wounded during the campaign against Hungary had access to medical care that was not available before, witnessing an unprecedented healing process. For years, I have been witnessing the dentistry examinations next to dr. Bilaşcu and after his premature death, I became in charge with the management of this field of education. I have tried at all times to preserve the surgical character of dentistry.*

Circumstances were on my side and I managed to fulfill my objective, thanks to dr. Aleman, former student of dr. Bilaşcu and his worthy follower" [2].

As the great scientist that he was, Professor I. Iacobovici sensed the importance and necessity of specialties that would deal with oral and maxillofacial pathology, with its peculiarities, not only traumatic and infectious, but also tumours, malformations, prosthetics, etc. Therefore, he anticipated a specialty that was looming but was still not outlined in medicine.

When the Romanian Society of Dentistry was established, in May 1938, presided by Professor I. Iacobovici, he made a presentation regarding the connection between dentistry and surgery, stating that *"dentistry takes from surgery its character of medical science, because the dentist's activity cannot be limited to putting in and taking out teeth. These activities involve operations that are many times necessary and delicate, but they are insufficient by nature to connect dentistry with general medicine. Many times, the dentist has to solve problems that are vital for the patient, the mouth being the gate to our body, an entry point for food but also for all sorts of infections."* [3].

When the great Professor made these claims he was not circumstantial. He really meant what he said, he had his beliefs, and he was an encyclopaedic spirit, not only in the medical field but also in the humanitarian one.

In his preface to the book *"Congenital cleft lip and cleft palate"* of 1931, the coordinator, dr. I. Aleman, future professor of dentistry, observed the following regarding the way in which Professor Iacobovici was thinking and supported a branch which struggled and fought hard to occupy its rightful place in medicine: *"this paper was published due to the goodwill of Professor Iacobovici, Director of Surgical Clinic in Cluj. We are expressing our gratitude for all his diligence shown to the Dentistry Clinic. Until three years ago, this clinic was completely lacking hospitalization facilities. During this time, we benefited from Professor Iacobovici's support, both regarding the spaces and also his hugely extensive medical experience"*.

This understanding made possible a strong cooperation between the Surgery and the Dentistry Clinics, in all matters regarding maxillofacial surgery, beneficial for the patients as well as for the medical staff.

Considered for a long time the step-daughter of medicine, Dentistry in our country is greatly indebted to Professor Iacobovici, who, convinced of its importance, always sought to rehabilitate the rights and rank it deserves, among other specialties of medicine [4].

Professor I. Aleman stated, in his comments dedicated to educational and scientific events that the doors of the Surgical Clinic, led by Professor Iacobovici, were always open for patients suffering from maxillofacial surgical diseases.

In order to understand the enlightening dimension of this great personality, we have to underline the fact that

at that time, Professor Iacobovici was a leading authority in surgery, recognized in national and European scientific circles, as he was approaching successfully, and sometimes following his own methods, an extremely broad surgical repertoire, ranging from abdominal surgery, urological, pulmonary, orthopaedic, to the head and neck, including maxillofacial and neurosurgery ones.

It was that genius in his spirit that allowed him to understand and accept that if you take away pieces from the entire spectrum of general surgery, and if you develop them separately but in synergy with the original discipline, the whole does not become smaller. Quite the contrary, it grows, just like a grain sown in fertile ground.

An outlook into this activity points out that he never considered that by helping the development of new specialties in his clinic (like, for example, urology or maxillofacial surgery) he would narrow the limits of the mother-specialty.

In his homage to Professor Iacobovici on his 60th birthday, Professor Emil Țeposu states that *"a hugely important innovation to our clinic is the introduction of borderline specialties that facilitate a bridge between surgery and the other medical branches"* [1].

This remark is perfectly valid for Dentistry and Maxillofacial Surgery, a fact admitted by Professor I. Aleman during several scientific gatherings, and mostly emphasized in the report by the Rector of the Superior Dacia University in 1922-1923 (the assignment belonged to Professor I. Iacobovici himself). In that report, he stressed in his Conclusions that the Faculty of Medicine needed a paediatric clinic, a dental clinic, an ENT clinic, a clinic for infectious diseases and a urology clinic.

Looking at the order of topics in this list of proposals, one can see that out of the five clinics, Dentistry is at the forefront. This only shows the way in which the great Professor understood the complexity of the new branch, which was already knocking at the gates of medicine, at home and abroad [5].

In this respect, one can say that Professor Iacob Iacobovici has surpassed the master, Professor Thoma Ionescu, who was a brilliant surgeon. As Dean of the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine he categorically opposed in the beginning the request of dr. D.D. Niculescu to set up a dental department [6].

With his open mind, Professor I. Iacobovici agreed – way ahead of his fellow doctors and surgeons – to the idea of surgical prostheses for various maxillofacial surgical treatments, or as a substitute tissue for maxillofacial mutilated, an idea promoted by Professor Aleman and hardly accepted by the other surgeons [7,8,9,10].

Numerous personalities have recognized Iacobovici's enlightened spirit.

Professor Dr. Dan Theodorescu, founder of the School of Dentistry and Oro-Maxillofacial Surgery in Bucharest, stated that: *"Professor I. Iacobovici was always*

present where dentistry needed advice or encountered an obstacle. He did so in Cluj, as well as in Bucharest" [11].

Professor Dr. Cornel Opriș always had a vivid gratitude for his fruitful apprenticeship under his guidance especially since Professor I. Iacobovici supported him in getting the Humboldt scholarship, specializing in maxillofacial surgery at Prof. Pichler and Wassmund's clinics in Berlin and Vienna [12].

In Cluj, his support meant a great deal for the evolution of the Dentistry Department as well as for the establishment of the first compulsory dental education in the Faculty of Medicine in Romania.

When the Department of Dentistry at the Faculty of Medicine in Cluj encountered some difficulties following the premature death of Professor Bilașcu, there was the question of replacing him with a specialized teacher from abroad, France or Germany, as head of department, because locally or even nationally there was no one that could meet the requirements imposed by the University (13).

Although Professor Dr. Rion Predescu from the ENT Department filled in the position till January 1930, he was not completely suitable and, consequently, there was an issue to be solved.

Discussions in the Teaching Council regarding the two foreign candidates never reached consensus, and finally, Professor Iacobovici, supported by Professor Nănescu and Professor Titu Vasiliu proposed Dr. I. Aleman to take the position, especially since he already worked in that Department and proved his efficiency as a teacher as well as a practitioner. As a matter of fact, Professor Iacobovici knew well Dr. Aleman from their cooperation in the maxillofacial surgery clinic.

Moreover, the great professor was interested in promoting the Romanian element in teaching positions of the University in Cluj as well as in the medical care, in general.

Prof. Iacobovici's opinion was always favourable to the requirements of the Dental Department, not only during Staff Councils in Cluj, but also during national level discussions in Bucharest, at the Ministry of Health.

At the Dental Congress, of May 29-30, 1943, Professor Dan Theodorescu from Bucharest made the following statement: *"I recall, when there was no dental clinic yet in Bucharest, I was in charge of consultations when I asked for the setup of a few places for patients who could not be treated on the spot. I received an answer accompanied by a condescending smile, saying that it was difficult to set up beds for those suffering from tooth aches. Only Professor Iacobovici understood my request, and it was only due to his persistent intervention that my request was finally granted"* [14].

Reflecting upon the statement by Professor Dan Theodorescu, one can notice that at that time (1943), the knowledge among the medical corps concerning Dentistry and Maxillofacial Surgery were so scarce that even the

upper management in the Ministry of Health was lacking the necessary notions, not to mention the regular doctors. However, since the end of the 19th Century D. Iacob Felix, and later on Dr. D.D. Niculescu, insisted on the importance of this branch and tried to impose it as part of the medical practice. Still, higher than the ignorant, there were the enlightened spirits, as we have already mentioned: Iacob Felix, Gheorghe Bilașcu and Iacob Iacobovici who joined the doctrine of dentistry and oral maxillofacial surgery, placing them in the place that was their due.

The spirit of good will and the personality of Professor Iacob Iacobovici will remain as one of the strengths in recognizing and developing education in Dentistry and Maxillofacial Surgery in Romania.

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