

Obituary

Prof. Dr. med. Oskar Schindler

* Sept. 18, 1936, Torre Pellice, † Oct. 20, 2020, Torino, Italy

1961 Graduation Medicine

1964 Specialization ENT

1967 Doc. Audiology

1968 Doc. ENT

1981 Ass. Professor of Phoniatics, Univ. of Torino

1997 Agent Professor of Audiology, Director of the Univ.
Clinic of Audiology and Phoniatics of Torino



Numerous publications, books as well as articles, in different languages including Japanese, Russian and Greek, recipient of many honors including the Gutzmann Medal.

With Prof. Dr. Oskar Schindler the last initiators of the Union of the European Phoniaticians (UEP) passed away. He followed Dušan Cvejić, Belgrade (1923-1998), Peter Biesalski, Mainz (1915-2001), and Gerhard Kittel, Erlangen (1925-2011). After the foundation of the UEP in 1971, Oskar Schindler was the first Secretary General of the UEP. In 1975, he was caught by a severe heart attack and had to resign from this position, and Oskar Caprez, Chur, Switzerland (1913-1993), took over.

Recovered from his disease, Oskar developed a great number of activities, also in the frame and to the benefit of the UEP. I would like to select just two aspects from my memories: His encompassing capacities as a polyglottic language master, and his heuristic approach to the profile and further development of our specialty.

Compared with to-day, the competence in foreign languages was generally pretty poor 50 years ago, even among “educated people”, what is true also for the members of the UEP. That is why their constitution from 1977 explicitly named four official languages: English, German, French, and Russian (reflected even in the official nomination of the organization). That means that every

organizer of a congress had to take care for simultaneous interpretation (an immense financial burden), and every official document had to be written in these four languages. Later this regulation had to be abandoned in favor of English. For the few people of the Board meetings, of course, the luxury of professional interpreters was not available. Luckily enough, there was Oskar Schindler, an enthusiastic European phoniatician. He was not only fluent in the different languages; he also was familiar with the mental and cultural backgrounds of the main groupings: the so-called German speaking phoniaticians and the francophone community. Thus, he was the ideal interpreter and an excellent moderator as well, when turbulences of any kind were coming up, and there were many of them. In his friendly, tranquilizing manner, he mostly managed to calm down the, at times, furious fighters and helped them to find acceptable compromises. Thus, he was indispensable to get the UEP working.

When we to-day, as a matter of course, are speaking about phoniatics as the medical specialty for communication disorders, we should remember that the door to this broader view at our field had been opened by Oskar Schindler to a large extent. At the 14th Congress of the UEP, Dresden 1987, he presented a fundamental paper as a basis for a historical model of verbal communication as follows: *Since the beginning of the 20th century a phoniatic model was dominating based on the hearing ear, the controlling brain, and the speaking mouth (reading eye, writing hand). It was the basis for action for the majority of phoniatic practitioners throughout even the second half of the 20th century. Although, from the 60ies and during the 80ies, verbal communication was also looked at as one of the components of communication encompassing all sensory inputs, controlling by the entire CNS, output to all muscles and others (i.e. secretion etc.), cultural and social interindividual interrelations, and finally, verbal communication as one of the components of communication as interaction between individuum and environment.* This view that Oskar Schindler had introduced also in many other presentations has proved to be of high practical relevance as to therapeutic consequences, for instance around aphasiology. In addition, the involvement of epistemologic-philosophical dimensions in addressing further perspectives of a specialty may also be seen as a kind of ennobling of an honorable handicraft.

Oskar Schindler's numerous publications already have been mentioned. I would like to add that all the corresponding manuscripts were, in fact, manu scripta, i.e. written by hand, in smallest letters, narrow lines and distances, and with practically no page margins. I used to speak about Oskar's "ant hand". Not easy to read, but always worthwhile, as was any come together with him.

My thoughts are with his family, the center of his life - his wife Bianca and their two sons, Giovanni and Antonio, the latter following his father's professional path and very successfully so. Let me embrace you all with all my best wishes.

Some time ago, I had urged the always busy Oskar to sleep more. His reply: When we will be dead, we'll have plenty of time to sleep.

Now, you have. Rest in peace. Thank you for having been with us, dear friend.

Juergen Wendler, Berlin, Germany