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A Tribute to Dr. Szilagyi

Roger F. Smith, MD*

Forty-seven years have passed since Emerick Szilagyi first came to Henry Ford Hospital, and during this time tremendous changes have taken place in the way modern medicine is practiced. Much of the progress that has occurred at our hospital, particularly in the field of vascular surgery, can be directly attributed to the efforts of Dr. Szilagyi. He clearly stands out as one of our most illustrious staff who has brought great distinction to himself and Henry Ford Hospital for his many significant contributions.

Dr. Szilagyi was born in Nagykaroly, Hungary; and after completing a classical European undergraduate education at Calvin College in Klausenburg, Hungary, the University of Debrecen in Hungary, and the Sorbonne in Paris, he joined his family in Michigan to enter the University of Michigan's medical school. Following graduation in 1935, he continued his education at the University Hospital in Ann Arbor with an internship and assistant residency in surgery for two years and then as a teaching assistant in pathology for an additional two years before coming to Henry Ford Hospital in 1939. After finishing his training with Dr. Roy D. McClure in 1942, he was assigned as medical director of the vital Ford Rubber Plantation in the Amazon Valley, Brazil. This exceptional clinical opportunity was an important phase in the preparation for a long and productive surgical career.

Dr. Szilagyi returned to Henry Ford Hospital in 1945 to serve successively as assistant surgeon, associate surgeon, chief of the Second General Surgical Division, chairman of the Department of Surgery, and consultant in the Division of Vascular Surgery until his retirement in 1985. His current role at the hospital is serving as first editor of the prestigious *Journal of Vascular Surgery* which he helped found.

Dr. Szilagyi's scientific contributions and innovations in the field of peripheral vascular surgery are well recognized, both nationally and internationally, for their excellence and pioneering value to the development of this important, new surgical discipline. He performed one of the world's first resection and homograft replacement of an abdominal aortic aneurysm (April 1951) and the first successful operation of this type in Michigan (December 1952). He was responsible for instituting a regional blood vessel bank at Henry Ford Hospital during the phase of homograft sterilization. From this early experience came the



Emerick Szilagyi (photo courtesy of Elson-Alexandre, Los Angeles, CA)

stimulus for investigation and development of a prosthetic vascular substitute, which has proved its therapeutic usefulness and which now has reached the stage of commercial production. Perhaps the most significant contribution of Dr. Szilagyi has been his critical review and reporting of our clinical results and observations based upon three decades of personal experience. The natural history of atherosclerotic peripheral vascular disease, the efficacy of vascular reconstruction, technical refinements, and surgical modifications are all representative of his clinical research efforts. Of the 165 articles Dr. Szilagyi has contributed to the literature, one of particular significance is entitled, "Contribution of Abdominal Aortic Aneurysmectomy to Prolongation

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of Life" (1), which was recognized as a Citation Classic in *Current Contents*, July 2, 1984. In fact, this paper has been quoted 153 times since its publication. Considering that the average article published in 1973 has been quoted only ten times, this distinction is truly remarkable. Two additional accomplishments of great value to the development of vascular surgery at Henry Ford Hospital include Dr. Szilagyi's creation of a Vascular Registry containing the longitudinal follow-up of over 26,000 patients, and his institution of a formal Vascular Surgical Fellowship Training Program—one of the first in the country—which now has 70 alumni practicing throughout the United States and abroad.

In recognition of his numerous accomplishments, Dr. Szilagyi has received most of the honors that his peers could bestow upon him. He has been president of the Central Surgical Association, Western Surgical Association, Midwestern Vascular Surgical Society, the North American Chapter of the International Society for Cardiovascular Surgery, and the Society for Vascular Surgery. He has been an invited guest lecturer throughout the world and a frequent visiting professor in academic medical centers in this country. In 1981 he was honored by giving the Matas Memorial Lecture before the XV International Congress of the International Society for Cardiovascular Surgery in Athens, Greece. Henry Ford Hospital has had no more dis-

tinguished ambassador representing its tradition of excellence than our own Emerick Szilagyi.

Dr. Szilagyi has been variously described as a scientific surgeon, critical thinker, teacher, a surgeon of uncompromising honesty, and the "conscience" of vascular surgeons. All of these attributes are valid, and furthermore it has been my privilege to consider him as a close friend. From a personal standpoint, the qualities I have learned to appreciate over the years in this exceptional surgeon and which, in my opinion, have been instrumental in his achieving the greatness we all admire are an inquiring brilliant mind; a vision for the future; a daring surgical innovator; the ability to wisely and efficiently use what resources were available, even if meager; and the skills of an effective communicator. It is indeed unusual for all of these characteristics to be found in one individual, but they certainly exist in Emerick Szilagyi. For those of us fortunate to be his associates, we are both grateful and proud. He has provided a unique legacy for Henry Ford Hospital that will not soon, if ever, be equaled.

Reference

1. Szilagyi ED, Smith RF, DeRusso FJ, Elliot JP, Sherrin FW. Contribution of abdominal aortic aneurysmectomy to prolongation of life. *Ann of Surg* 1966;164:678-99.