



The year-round Multi-Specialist Program
for Preventing Civilization Diseases
and Supporting the Health of Poles

Editor: Prof. Henryk Skarżyński,
M.D., Ph.D., Dr. h.c. multi



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Dear Sir or Madam!

Initiated by me in 2016, the Multi-Specialist Year-round Program for Preventing Civilization Diseases and Supporting the Health of Poles “Health First” is being expanded to a larger scale. Every year, multi-specialized medical teams took part in screening tests throughout Poland, inviting residents of cities, towns, and municipalities for consultations and tests. That is the opportunity to assess the health of large populations for diseases that are a growing problem in our society - communication disorders and lifestyle diseases. They are the biggest threats to health and life, and their treatment consumes the most financial outlays. For years, these include: cardiovascular, neoplastic and nervous system and sensory organs developing based on neurodegenerative changes, especially in the elderly. The results of population screening in people of different age groups allow obtaining valuable information on the health of all generations of Poles, changing needs, and scientific search for solutions that will help to develop a comprehensive prevention program in the future. The core of the “Health First” Program are free hearing tests, both for children, adults, and seniors, supported by consultations with doctors of other specialties. Thanks to the support of the “Dar Serca” Orlen Foundation and PKN Orlen, we were able to enlarge the group of specialist doctors conducting tests and providing consultations. People from visited cities and municipalities could take advantage of the advice of otorhinolaryngologists, pediatric otolaryngologists, ophthalmologists, periodontists, cardiologists, dieticians, oncologists, child and adolescent psychiatrists, dermatologists, hematologists, audiologists, pediatricians, clinical psychologists, engineers, speech therapists, technicians as well as general, maxillary and vascular surgeons. Health is our greatest asset, that’s why we try to build pro-health attitudes among Poles with such consistency. With the involvement of scientific associations and non-governmental organizations, which have been supporting the “Health First” Program from four years, the Committee of Clinical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Main Council of Research Institutes, I initiated the organization of the 1st Congress “Poles Health 2019”, which took place on November 18th and 19th 2019 at the Copernicus Science Center in Warsaw. The Congress became an opportunity to summarize the “Health First” Program, but above all it started the national discussion on health, aimed at determining the main strategies for the operation of various state, local government, scientific, clinical and expert groups, and patient groups that had, have, and in particular will have an impact on the condition of our society, building pro-health attitudes and supporting intergenerational solidarity.

Henryk Skarżyński

Idea and goals of the “Health First” Program

The Multi-Specialist Year-round Program for Preventing Civilization Diseases and Supporting the Health of Poles “Health First” was initiated in 2016 by Prof. Henryk Skarżyński. The project is planned for the next few years, and its goal is to develop a nationwide screening program in many medical specialties and to create new standards for preventing civilization diseases in Poland. The program was supported by the Committee of Clinical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Main Council of Research Institutes. Its main implementers are the World Hearing Center of the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing, the Institute of Sensory Organs, in cooperation with numerous expert teams in many specialties, scientific societies, and non-governmental organizations. The main media partners are: Polish Television and Polish Radio. The initiative has received great support from the medical community as well as medicine and health media.

In the years 2016–2019, the “Health First” Program covered nearly 100 cities, towns and communes throughout Poland. Some locations were visited by the Mobile Hearing Center and Mobile Medical Center two or even three times.

In 2016, specialists from the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing performed hearing screening every weekend of the holiday before the concert organized by Polish Radio on the summer tour “Summer with Radio”. Also, residents of visited cities could take advantage of the advice of otolaryngologists, audiologists, phoniatriests, and specialists in hearing rehabilitation (psychologists, educators, speech therapists). In 16 cities and towns over 5,000 people benefited from examinations and advice.

In 2017, more than 70 specialists from various fields of medicine were involved in the Program – otolaryngology, audiology, phoniatriy, periodontology, ophthalmology, neurology, cardiology, vascular surgery, urology, dermatology. In total, specialists conducted over 8,000 consultations and tests. Mobile Hearing Center and Mobile Medical Center have traveled almost 8,000 kilometers across the country.

In 2018, the interdisciplinary team of specialists has grown even more thanks to the support of the “Dar Serca” Orlen Foundation. In addition to otolaryngologists, audiologists and phoniatriests from the IFPS World Hearing Center, and the Institute of Sensory Organs, there were specialists in periodontology, ophthalmology, cardiology, dermatology, oncology, urology, hematology, surgery, maxillary surgery, pediatrics, child and youth psychiatry, gastroenterology and dietetics. This team set off to Poland 34 times. Several thousands of patients have benefited from the tests and consultations.

The fourth edition of the Program began at the beginning of 2019 and lasted for five months – until the end of October. In 2019, thanks to the support of PKN Orlen, it was possible to expand the group of specialists conducting tests and providing medical consultations in other cities, towns, and communes covered by the Program. Guests of our “medical towns” could examine their hearing, as well as take advantage of the advice of general and pediatric otolaryngologists, audiologists, phoniatriests, speech therapists, ophthalmologists, periodontists, cardiologists, hematologists, oncologists, dermatologists, general and vascular surgeons, speech therapists, educators, pediatricians, general and pediatric psychologists, dietary urologists, clinical engineers and technicians.

– We want to make Poles aware that these tests are of key importance in the early detection of diseases. They should also become the foundation of a real preventive health program in Poland, covering various fields of medicine – said Prof. Henryk Skarżyński in one of the interviews.

Wherever the Mobile Hearing Center and Mobile Medical Center parked in the years 2016–2019, there were plenty of people interested in examinations and consultations. “It is worth using the advice of doctors, because the queue to a specialist is long,” repeated the inhabitants of Legionowo, the first city where the Mobile Hearing Center arrived in 2016. Traveling around Polish cities, sometimes spaced a few hundred kilometers apart, we heard from residents what problems they have with access to spe-

cialists. In Miastko, the interest in hearing tests exceeded the expectations of specialists. From the early morning hours, queues were lining up at the Mobile Hearing Center. The waiting time for tests was up to three hours. Why so many people wanted to use them? One of the first patients explained. "There is no specialist in our city. I would have to drive several dozen kilometers for an examination or consultation,". People had to wait a minimum of one hour in Płońsk, Solec Kujawski, Inowrocław, Świeradów-Zdrój and many other cities on the route of specialized teams. Inhabitants of smaller cities, where access to specialists is the biggest problem, appreciated the opportunity to benefit from consultations and outdoor examinations. Grateful patients from small towns and communes did not end their visit by usual "goodbye". They used to say "goodbye" and add "see you next year," hoping that our interdisciplinary teams will return to their town.

In the years 2016–2019 tens of thousands of people benefited from consultations, medical advice, and tests. It is worth noting that the group of Program beneficiaries should include not only patients who came for examinations and consultations, but also accompanying family members, friends, etc. who also visited medical and information stands. People were truly interested in what was happening in "medical towns"; asked many questions about preventive medicine, or looked through the materials prepared by us. Millions of Poles obtained valuable information on disease prevention and early detection thanks to the media – radio, television, press, internet portals. The media reported what was happening under the "Health First" Program with support of the authority of specialists from various fields of medicine. This knowledge may prove to be priceless sometime in the future, it will help to avoid serious health problems. If the patient notices even seemingly trivial symptoms, but he is aware that they can be a symptom of a serious illness, he will see a doctor before this disease develops, saving his health and even his life.

"This time it wasn't me who went to the doctor, but the doctor came to me," said one of the seniors waiting in line for consultation. Elderly people constituted a significant percentage of those visiting "health towns." Direct contact with patients of this age who may have problems getting to the doctor is extremely important. I consider that our particular success was that we reached, among others, this particular group of society. That is a group with the largest number of people who need help in the form of well-coordinated care – emphasized Prof. Henryk Skarżyński, recalling alarming data – three-quarters of people over 70 have a hearing impairment and problems with everyday communication.

Outdoor consultations and research in the years 2016–2019 and numerous conversations with the inhabitants of visited cities and towns clearly showed how much more needs to be done in the field of health prevention and how significant a role screening in the health care of Poles can be, especially in terms of senses disorders and diseases called civilizational, which most often affect us.

Towns covered by the “Health First” Program in the years 2016–2019

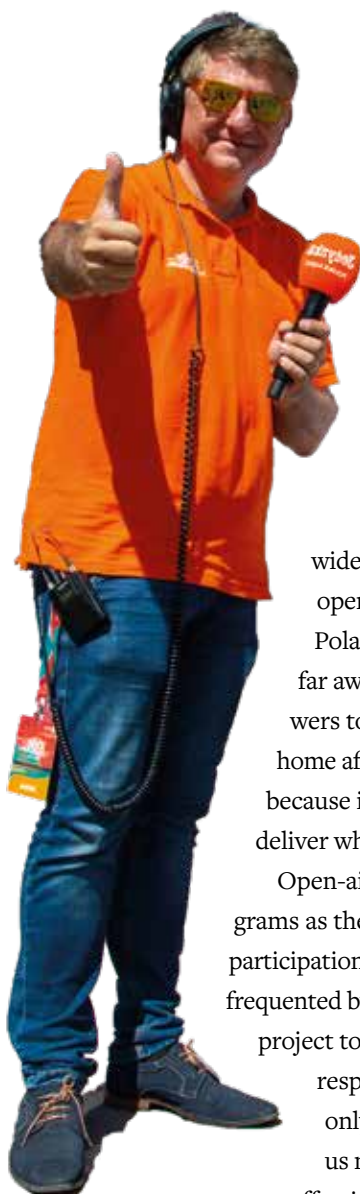


- Towns where tests were performed in 2016 campaign.
- Towns where campaigns tests were performed in 2016 and 2017.
- Towns where campaigns tests were performed in 2017.
- Towns where campaigns tests were performed in 2018.
- Towns where campaigns tests were performed in 2016, 2017 and 2018.
- Towns where campaign tests were performed in 2019.

MOBILE HEARING CENTER is a modern otolaryngologic office on wheels equipped with a soundproof hearing test booth.



MOBILE MEDICAL CENTER is a vehicle with a modern and spacious consultation room, adapted to conduct various medical examinations.



4th Edition is Completed

Roman Czejarek, Polish Radio journalist recounts joint tour of the Health First and Summer with the Radio programs. Why do these two projects work so well together?

The Health First Program can be seen in different ways depending on one's perspective. Doctors and experts will talk about it differently from the way patients feel about it. A lot depends also on such factors as if a visit in the mobile testing center was planned and deliberate or spontaneous and random which also happens when for example we run into a bunch of specialists on our Saturday walk. And since it is free and there is no queue... maybe it is worth using this opportunity?

I see the Health First project from yet another perspective. I've been working in nationwide media as a journalist for over 30 years, mostly in radio and television. I've been organizing open-air tours for Summer with the Radio - the most popular summertime radio program in Poland - for a quarter of the century. I know how much effort it takes to organize something far away from a radio studio, I also know how much work it takes to persuade listeners and viewers to spend their free time on the weekend with us. And most importantly, so that they come home after the event satisfied and looking forward to another such event in the future. It is crucial, because if we want our work to bring results and continue we can't lose people's trust. We have to deliver what we have promised and what people have been expecting.

Open-air tours with the Health First project are very similar to the Summer with the Radio programs as they have a lot in common. In both cases we go out to meet people in Poland. Additionally, participation in our programs requires no tickets, it is free. We work during summer holidays, in places frequented by crowds of tourists, aiming to reach as many people as we possibly can. The goal is for the project to be a regular and recurring summer event, not just one season thing. This means that the responsibility for our actions is even higher. Because this means that we need our guests not only to feel that they have invested their free time well, but also that they will definitely join us next year. Even better if they tell their friends about it afterwards. This is the best and most effective advertisement, which makes our work following years more meaningful.

The Health First program was launched for the first time three years ago. It wasn't easy at the beginning as we were all learning new things. No one knew if people would feel like seeing a specialist who had come to them. It wasn't that obvious based on the experiences of others. There are many sad examples. How many times have we seen mammography and cytology mobile vehicles and blood-collecting buses around Poland, parked at various market squares, waiting for hours for anyone to come. Very well equipped, offering free testing, but... there were no interested people or only a few of them. It is sad, but it is real. On top of this, after a few unsuccessful visits like this employees were getting frustrated, because they were giving it all and saw no effects they had expected. We really didn't want to repeat this mistake.

There is no doubt that apart from offering high quality it was also crucial to adequately promote and publicize our actions. Simple analysis of mistakes made by our predecessors showed that even though they often had excellent equipment and specialists, they didn't know how to effectively 'sell' it in local and national media. Usually, the only invitations to visit them were scarce posters somewhere on a notice board of a local district office, completely lost in the sea of other council notices. Even placing the mobile centers in central places, such as market squares, local markets, or school parking lots, didn't help. People could see the mammography and cytology mobile vehicles, but they wouldn't approach them. And to have

a queue of a few people waiting in front of one of them was totally out of reach. So the conclusion was clear - high quality offered has to be accompanied by good promotion and coverage of the program. And here is another important element: invitation to participate in such an event has to be addressed directly to the interested people. General conversations on a national radio or television are good and also needed, but unless they provide specific information on the place and available specialists every time, they are not very effective. So we had to answer the question: what is the right way to do it?

The key turned out to be combining wide offer of the Health First Program and popularity of Summer with the Radio. For a public media service provider such as Polish Radio or Program 1, the organizer of Summer with the Radio, collaboration with such a renowned organization as the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing in Kajetany, is a dream come true. Especially when such a well-known and respected person as Professor Henryk Skarżyński, creator and founder of the World Hearing Centre, is endorsing it. On the other hand, for the Centre in Kajetany Summer with the Radio is a guarantee that hard work of the doctors traveling to the sites will not be wasted. That it is possible when we combine effective coverage of the program in national media with subsequent local announcements indicating specific places and visiting specialists.

Every year of this cooperation brings new experiences. After first, 'modest' tours we started working on increasing the number of specialists. At the first Mobile Hearing Centers of the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing only doctors from Kajetany were giving consultations. This combination of 'radio-hearing' seemed perfect and enough, there were queues of people waiting for examinations, but conversations with patients and listeners revealed that they expect something more. And because of that, in following years, we expanded the offer of available tests, as well as, the team of specialists available to patients. It is worth mentioning that we had some of the best Polish experts there, people with professor titles, enormous professional experience and international recognition. It is fair to say that for many of the patients, who participated in our program, it was their only chance to talk directly and consult with a specialist of such a high profile. Let's not forget: for free and without months long waiting.

During this year's tour we visited among others: Mragowo, Giżycko, Zakopane, Puck, Kraków, Warszawa, Międzyzdroje, Gdynia, Stalowa Wola... Large cities and small towns, the popular ones and those less known. There were plenty of interested people around the mobile centers in all of them. Next to the medical vehicles there was an outdoor radio station where interesting guests were appearing non-stop for a few hours. Among them, also doctors offering consultations during the Health First Program and satisfied patients. The doctors were speaking about their work in an accessible way, about what they do, what kind of questions patients ask and what an examination looks like. They also gave advice and answered some questions from the audience coming through a special SMS radio channel. The patients were confirming that it was worth it to come. And they were saying that not only they would come back next year, but they would also bring their families, friends and acquaintances.

It needs to be emphasized as well that it was a very important thing for us to have such a serious company as PKN Orlen as our patron. In this modern world full of advertisements and sponsors, the only guarantee of quality is cooperation with the best. In our case, a very positive brand image of PKN Orlen, well known to all of our guests, was a perfect match for our program. Because if we want for the doctor consultations to be treated seriously we need to ensure that our biggest partners are also serious and broadly respected. In this case, our three organizations: the World Hearing Centre in Kajetany, PKN Orlen and Polish Radio reflect it perfectly, highlighting each other's value. For us, as co-organizers of the Health First program, it is particularly important. Thank you very much and we are looking forward to some more successful cooperation in the future.

See you in 2020!

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Photos:

Archives of the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing.
Persons participating in medical examinations and consultations
conducted as part of the “First Health” Program have agreed to use
their image in informational and promotional materials and pub-
lications of the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing.

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