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Obituary – Prof. MVDr. Karel Hruška, CSc.

EVA BARANYIOVA

Veterinary Research Institute, Brno, Czech Republic

*Corresponding author: eva.baranyiova@vri.cz

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With the passing of Professor MVDr. Karel Hruška, CSc., on March 24, 2022, the Czech veterinary community has lost an outstanding figure in basic and applied veterinary research. His remarkable legacy also includes bringing the discipline into the computer era as well as enduring contributions as an educator and editor.

Professor Hruška was the paramount personality shaping the development of the *Veterinární Medicina* journal from 1991 until 2014.

Professor Hruška was born (December 21, 1935) in Prague into the family of the famous veterinarian MVDr. Karel Hruška (graduated in Vienna, 1917), an outstanding expert in epizootiology, who in 1931 was nominated by President Masaryk to be a member of the state Health Committee. Among his international contacts were personalities such as E.E. Yersin, C.A. Calmette, M.C. Quéirin, and P.E. Roux. All these scientists were pioneers in detecting the most dangerous bacteria and viruses (i.e. human tuberculosis, bubonic plague, discovery of filterable viruses), and ways to combat the diseases caused by them. As a result, he was involved in research on zoonoses (anthrax, bovine tuberculosis, tetanus, glanders, erysipelas and also served as director of the State Veterinary Institute producing animal vaccines (1938–1948). Later, he worked at the newly founded Veterinary Research Institute in Brno.

It is no wonder that young Karel was deeply influenced by his father's life mission in veterinary sciences, and in 1953 he began his studies at the Veterinary Faculty in Brno. During his graduate studies he worked on nuclear techniques in agricultural research and the use of statistics in biology. He then taught at the Department of Biochemistry



(1957–1970) and for a short time he served as Head of the Department (1966–1968). Hruška specialised in physiology and biochemistry to become docent (associate professor) in 1968, and professor in veterinary medicine and gynaecology in 1992. In the years 1965–1969, he was the coordinator of a project (Czech Academy of Sciences) on animal reproduction.

In 1971, Hruška began his work at the Veterinary Research Institute in Brno, oriented towards aspects of bovine reproduction. In the years 1975–1980, he was the principal investigator in a project of the International Agency for Atomic Energy (IAAE) and developed methods for radioimmunoanalysis of hormones in milk. In the years 1987–1989, he worked at the Department of Biophysics, and from 1990 he was responsible for systems of management and diagnostics. In the years 1990–2001, he served as director of the Institute.

Professor Hruška was involved in many international projects; for example, in the *Framework Programmes EU: NMSACC-PCVD, EU-US Safe Food*, project *ESF Development of Human Resources in Research* and project *CareMAN*. He was also a member of the *International Advisory Board* for the *Pathogen Combat* project as well as several others.

Hruška also coordinated (from 1999) the international FAO network *Veterinary Biotechnology, Epidemiology and Food Safety Network for Central and Eastern Europe-CENTAUR*; he produced the electronic journal *CENTAUR Newsletter Flash Information* (ISSN 1213-368X), and he managed the webpage of this information source until 2014. More than 1 200 registered members from 70 countries were using the website.

In 1992, he was a main protagonist in the “*Seminary on biotechnology research planning and management*” (organized by FAO, *Animal Health Service*), and in 1997, he organised the *Regional training workshop “Priority diseases of cattle, modernisation of diagnostic and disease control methods in Central and Eastern Europe”* and No. TCP/RER/4551 “*Regional training in veterinary biotechnology for the improved control of livestock and poultry diseases*”. In 1999, he supported the project “*Concerted action for the setting up of a European veterinary network on diagnosis, epidemiology and research of mycobacterial diseases (Veterinary network on Mycobacteria)*” Program Fair: FAIR6-CT98-4373 in the years 1999–2003).

Professor Hruška was a member of several national and international scientific societies such as the Czech Academy of Agricultural Sciences (serving as its President 1993–1996). He was a founding member of the Czech Grant Agency and served as its Vice-President in the period of 1992–2001.

In recent years, after his retirement, he immersed himself in studies of mycobacteria, published important work on infectious and autoimmune diseases and prepared materials on good laboratory practice and others. He also continuously raised awareness among the Czech authorities and the public, pointing to the occurrence of mycobacteria in milk products for babies and in swimming pool waters and to the context of the rising occurrence of Crohn’s disease in humans.

Professor Hruška leaves another profound footprint in the field of the publishing and editing of veterinary sciences. He became a member and

Chairman of the Editorial Board as of 1991 and managed the journal *Veterinární Medicina* (Veterinary Medicine – Czech) until 2014. The editorial board had then only eight Czech and Slovak members, and all papers were published in these two languages, not all with English abstracts. In 1996, the first member from abroad joined the Editorial Board, in 1998 there were a further two and the Board grew to 15 members. In 1998, also the first website of the journal was created. A real breakthrough occurred in 2007, when the editorial board became truly international with 37 members of which 27 came from abroad, all from countries with a track record of excellency in veterinary sciences. This was, no doubt, a result of concentrated efforts from Professor Hruška, who always selected the best peer reviewers worldwide and recruited them to the board. The journal thus finally became truly international. As a logical consequence, the authorship became international as well. The last articles solely in Czech occurred in 2000, along with those in English with Czech or Slovak abstracts. Soon, all articles began to be published in English. It was his well-thought-out strategy that facilitated the inclusion of the journal into more products of Thomson Reuters (former Institute for Scientific Information founded by Eugene Garfield in 1956), such as *Focus on Veterinary Science and Medicine™*. The growing agenda of the journal needed a new way of management. In the period of 2009–2010, with his coworkers he developed and launched an efficient and reliable online editorial management system that served us well until 2019.

The commitment of Professor Hruška to the quality of the journal was evident not only in his commitment to promoting a rigorous peer review process, but also in ensuring that articles published in the journal were always free of language mistakes and understandable for the scientific community. For this important work he recruited Dr. N. Donnelly, then at the University of Aberdeen, UK, who has done his internship at the Institute in the years 2007–2008 and continued this invaluable work for the journal until the summer of 2019.

In the period of 1999–2014, Professor Hruška devoted much of his energy and care to authors publishing in the journal in a very special way: he first launched the VETMED-CZECH AUTHOR’S CLUB and began to produce the e-mail Bulletin for Authors, occurring online with each issue of the journal. It was sent to all authors and provided

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not only the contents and links to articles but also Letters to the Editor, various tips on how to improve science writing, how to use statistics and links to international resources in the area of publishing etc. The authors were a kind of a broad family circle to him.

Professor Hruška was also a member of the Advisory Board of the *Acta Veterinaria Hungarica* and the *Journal of Advanced Veterinary and Animal Research*, as well as a Board member of the *Acta Veterinaria Brno* in the early 1990s. He served as peer reviewer for many other journals.

One important result of his work should not be omitted in this, in no way complete, outline of his achievements: in 2009, a 500-page textbook *The Ecology of Mycobacteria. Impact on Animal's*

and Human's Health was published by Springer. Professor Hruška is one of its four authors. The reviews of the book are excellent, with one reader saying for example: “It presents the state of the art of the ecology of mycobacteria, a virtual gold mine of the subject. Do not miss it.”

We will all undoubtedly miss Karel Hruška – who was a true “gold mine” of knowledge, culture, perseverance, accuracy and honesty in science.

R.I.P.

Eva Baranyiová
Co-editor (2020–to date)
Veterinarní Medicína
Editor-in-Chief (2015–2019)