

Journey of the Universe : the first in Wroclaw open-heart surgery with the use of the heart-lung machine.

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Sixty years ago, on 12 April 1961 Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space opening the era of the Universe exploration. The same day, Dr. Wiktor Bross in Wroclaw performed successfully one of the first open-heart surgeries in Poland with the use of the heart-lung machine. The patient was an 11-year-old boy with ventricular septal defect (VSD) and atrial septal defect (ASD II).

On May 6, 1953, in Philadelphia, after 23 years of experiments, John Gibbon successfully performed the first open-heart surgery in humans using his heart-lung machine. A 18-year-old college student, Cecylia Bavolek (of Polish origin) was discharged home after 13 days. The pioneering surgery gave her another 47 years of normal life.

Wiktor Bross (1903-1994) for many years was the head of the 2nd Department and Clinic of Surgery at the Medical University of Wrocław. He founded the Wrocław School of Surgery. In 1958 he performed the first open-heart surgery (under hypothermia) in Poland and closed ASDII. A trip to the USA on a Rockefeller scholarship in the years 1958–1959 enabled Dr. Bross to learn about the treatment of heart defects with extracorporeal circulation. Leaving the United States, he took with him a valuable gift from the Polish American community: a Kay-Cross type heart-lung machine. On 12 April 1961 this machine was used for the successful surgical treatment of an 11-year-old boy.

The success of this pioneering surgery, like the journey to the space paved the way for further research and the development of new surgical techniques helping to save patients from life-threatening heart conditions. On the occasion of this anniversary we would like to remind the story of this milestone in Polish cardiac surgery from 60 years ago. Today the patient would be 71 years old. We tried to find him by publishing an appeal in the press, on the occasion of an article presenting the history of cardiac surgery and heart-lung machines. Only patients operated by Prof. Bross in the following years contacted the authors, while the fate of the presented patient remains still unknown.