

Doctor Aureliu Metzulescu and his contribution to preventing scarlet fever

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Abstract

By his activity, Doctor Aureliu Metzulescu (1873-1948) contributed to the development of the Romanian medical system from the first half of the 20th century.

The great scientific accomplishment of Doctor Metzulescu, which brought him national and international recognition and reputation, was the introduction of certain methods of serotherapy in the treatment of infectious diseases, i.e. scarlet fever, because he obtained remarkable results by applying them.

Key words: Aureliu Metzulescu, treatment, serotherapy, scarlet fever, infectious diseases, Craiova.

Doctor Aureliu Metzulescu was born on 18th September 1873 in Craiova. He attended the primary, secondary school and high school in the same city and in 1891 he graduated the baccalaureate at Carol I High School. During 1891-1897, he was a student at The Faculty of Medicine within the University of Bucharest and in 1897 he was awarded the title of doctor in medicine.

He climbed the medical scale by attending competitions. In 1900 he was doctor of the middle administrative class in Olt County. After graduating the exam for city and hospital doctors, he worked as a doctor in Craiova, during 30th October 1900-16th March 1906. He became MD after graduating the exam for vacant permanent positions offered for doctors in cities, rural area hospitals, county hospitals and first class prisons. The exam took place at the Health

Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and was confirmed by The Superior Health Council. During 1906-1935, he was MD at the Hospital for Infectious Diseases and after that he was honour MD at the Dr. A. Metzulescu Hospital for Tuberculosis, a health unit which he created and administered (Leferman, 2005: 206).

The situation of infectious diseases in the first decades of the 20th century was difficult in Romania because the measures for preventing them were neglected and those who became ill did not follow the prescribed diet, this leading to serious complications, many of them presenting to the doctor too late. During that period a treatment against infections had not been found yet. However, people responded to preventive vaccination and to specific serotherapy, although they had been used for a short period of time and they lacked a clear, scientific methodology (Dinu, 2014: 216).

The great scientific accomplishment of Doctor Metzulescu, which brought him national and international recognition and reputation, was the introduction of certain methods of serotherapy in the treatment of infectious diseases, because he obtained remarkable results in applying them. Metzulescu considered that the only antidote that could lead to the destruction of scarlet fever in the future was mandatory vaccination, as in the case of smallpox (Metzulescu, 1925: 128-132).

The Romanian Academy appreciated his original contribution to combating infectious diseases and awarded him the Ph.D. Victor Babes prize, on 13th May 1928, consisting of 10000 lei, for the paperwork about the treatment of serious scarlet fever. The rapporteur for awarding the prize was the great scientist Doctor Gheorghe Marinescu.

Wanting to encourage the scientific works on combating infectious diseases, he donated the sum of 10000 lei, from his own funds, to create a Metzulescu fund, from which the Romanian Academy could award the works contributing to the struggle against infectious diseases. Moreover, he donated the entire sum received as an award for building a monument in honour of Doctor Victor Babes (Olaru, 1983: 223).

Besides this, he also published the following works: *A Few Thoughts on Cholera of 1913*, Craiova, 1914; *A Few Thoughts on Scarlet Fever and its Prophylactic Treatment by Iodine Tincture*, in 1914, *The Map of Tuberculosis in Craiova* (1908); *The Treatment of Viper Bite* (Dinu, 2014: 217).

In November 1929, the expert of the Society of Nations, Doctor D. Mackensie, visited the Hospital for Infectious Diseases because he was interested in the treatment of scarlet fever. Then, on 19th November 1929, doctor Mackensie wrote from Zagreb to doctor Metzulescu and told him that he had visited the Hospital for Infectious Diseases in Belgrade where he saw serious cases of scarlet fever: "I talked to the doctor in charge of these cases about the method you are using and I underlined the importance of using the convalescent serum. This made him very interested and I also promised him I would write to you and ask you to send him one or two copies of the little brochure about the treatment of scarlet fever by convalescent serum, which you so kindly offered to me" (Olaru, 1983: 224). Afterwards, Doctor Mackensie told him that he had recommended Doctor Ilici to come to Romania in order to see how the convalescent serum treatment is applied (Dinu, 2014: 218).

After the inspection at the Hospital for Infectious Diseases in Craiova in 1929, conclusions were drawn and the Ministry of Health awarded the superior and the inferior personnel of the hospital, represented by Doctor Aureliu Metzulescu, Doctor Vulcanescu, sub-surgeons Mosoiu and Panoiu, supervisor Demetrian, midwife Voica and a nurse, the Healthcare Merit medal, but doctor Metzulescu gave up any reward. Among the people who participated and spoke at the solemn ceremony, there were doctor Charles Laugier, Doctor T. Voiculescu and Doctor Aureliu Metzulescu.

As a token of appreciation for his therapeutic initiatives, Doctor Metzulescu and the city of Craiova had the honour of organising the first National Congress on Infectious Diseases, which took place on 27th and 28th October 1934, under the patronage of the Ministry of Health and local authorities, having as guests academic professors of specialty from the three faculties of medicine in

Romania. The session was opened by doctor Constantinescu, taking place at the National Theatre. After the minister's speech, Doctor Metzulescu followed, as president of the Organization Committee, and then professors Ionescu-Mihaiesti, Balteanu, Gavrilă, spokespersons from the faculties of medicine. Doctor Mironescu, PhD. Ciuca, PhD. Combiescu, Doctor Alexandru Plevianu, Doctor Stefan Atanasiu, Doctor Bazgan (Chisinau), Doctor V. Daschievici (Alba-Iulia), Doctor V. Vasilescu (Constanta) and many others followed afterwards. Throughout the Congress, organisational problems as well as matters regarding prevention and treatment of exanthemata typhus, diphtheria, diphtheria-caused paralysis, vaccination against smallpox and diphtheria, roentgen therapy of the diphtheroids tonsils, autohemotherapy of the exanthemata typhus (Metzulescu) and other matters were debated. On this occasion, the Ministry of Health and the participants at the Congress visited the hospitals in Craiova. The works presented in the session were published in a volume (Olaru, 1983: 225).

Regarding the medical assistance in the rural area, Doctor Metzulescu suggested a series of real solutions that were published in the local newspapers and in Bucharest. *Le Progrès*, the official newspaper of the Averescan Party, published in French, on 17th and 21st March 1926, large parts from the statements of doctor Aureliu Metzulescu on major public health matters, his opinions regarding social diseases like tuberculosis, syphilis, alcoholism, marsh fever and infectious diseases in Romania, indicating solutions for improving the deficiencies in the organization of health assistance: building health centres in every village, with a drugstore and instruments for emergencies like work accidents (Dinu, 2014: 219).

He also recommended that in every county centre there should be: a hospital with 100 beds, having two sections, one for surgery and the other for internal diseases, a hospital for infectious diseases with a lab and isolation rooms, some portable (dismountable) hospitals for 100 sick people, which could be used in the county where outbreaks would appear, rural hospitals with 20 beds each, that would be used for several villages, as well as clinics

for infectious diseases in the three academic centres. In these notes, Doctor Metzulescu also sustained the foundation of faculties and schools of medicine that may train doctors from rural areas, as well as founding schools for sanitary agents and midwives, county schools for social sisters to learn about the rearing of children in the rural area, building homes for the doctors in the area, adopting health measures for preventing infectious diseases in harbours and at the borders, monopoly on alcohol and its prohibition on the Romanian territory (Olaru, 1983: 226-227). Therefore, Doctor Metzulescu thought of a complex health programme for improving the health organisation of the country.

He returned to these issues in the monthly paper "The New Line", which appeared in Bucharest between November-December 1933, this time with statistics concerning all these issues. Thus, in his article *The Health Politics*, he pointed out the major problems of the public health: the birth rate and infant death rate, suggesting improving measures, like the settlement of the doctors in the rural area, reorganising districts, building health centres, etc. (Dinu, 2014: 220).

In his article entitled *The Struggle against Tuberculosis*, published in Bucharest in the newspaper "The Amendment" on 24th August 1927, he debated the issue regarding this disease and proved that of 600,000 people sick of tuberculosis 60,000 died annually. To fight this disease, Doctor Metzulescu and Doctor Charles Laugier proposed the isolation of the sick and mass vaccination of the new born babies with BCG (Dinu, 2014: 294). He was against hospitalization of contagious patients in mixed hospitals and in hospitals for internal diseases, because of the great risk of contamination and he considered that it was extremely important to build hospitals for the patients suffering from tuberculosis, therefore he founded the Hospital for Tuberculosis in Craiova, which bore his name (Canciulescu, 1964: 225).

In November 1940, he presented an essay entitled *How History Is Written* (related to the BCG vaccination) to the History of Medicine Romanian Society and in May 1941, at the Medico-Pharmaceutical

Circle Craiova, he presented Tracking Tuberculosis by intradermo reaction in secondary schools in Craiova, which proves his permanent preoccupation with fighting this disease (Laugier & Metzulescu, 1922: 385-388).

At the 30th celebration of the foundation of the Medical-Pharmaceutical Circle, Doctor Metzulescu was elected president of this scientific society in 1932 and, as president, he made several proposals like: inviting professors from Bucharest and Cluj, who could lecture to doctors about social diseases and the latest scientific discoveries within training sessions. He asked the members of the Circle to travel to different rural centres, on Sundays and at holidays, to lecture on social diseases, hygiene and to offer free consultation to the villagers.

Moreover, he recommended that doctors should take five or six days scientific trips to academic centres, during their leave of absence, where they could participate at lectures, like the conferences held by PhD. Stefan Nicolau and PhD. D. Paulian, in order to update their knowledge with the newest scientific information and to examine the most interesting hospitalized cases.

On 25th May 1929, during the debate, Doctor Aureliu Metzulescu and Doctors Charles Laugier, Baculescu, Canciulescu, Bianu and Titeica were among the initiators of creating the University of Craiova. Actually, founding this cultural superior location was an old dream of the doctors and scientists from this city.

In 1939 he was elected president of the Craiova Branch of the Temperance League and in 1943 he was elected manager of the Hospital for Infectious Diseases (Olaru, 1983: 227), a position which he occupied until the end of his life, in 1948.

In conclusion, we might say that doctor Aureliu Metzulescu was a complex personality of his native urban place, to which he gave his entire intellectual energy, 45 years of permanent activity, engaged in fighting against infectious diseases and in numerous social and cultural actions.

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