

Chronicle

Professor James Harlan Steele, DVM (1913–2013). Obituary.

Zbigniew Pawłowski



Dr J.H. Steele was born in Chicago on the 3rd April 1913, and passed away on the 10th of November 2013 in Houston. He graduated from Chicago High School in 1930, was made Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 1941 (Michigan State University) and Master of Public Health in 1942 (Harvard University). He was involved in the creation of the first national veterinary public health programs, both for the US government (Veterinary Public Health Program in Washington DC; Veterinary Public Health Division, within the Communicable Disease Center, Atlanta GA, since 1947) and several international institutions (FAO, WHO, PAHO).

Dr Steele soon became a highly-recognized international authority in Veterinary Medicine Public Health. By the end of his governmental career in 1971, he was the first Assistant Surgeon General on all affairs related to veterinary medicine in the US and had been awarded the rank of two-star Admiral. From 1971 to 1983, Dr Steele was Professor of Environmental Health at University of Texas School of Public Health. Many world authorities from Epidemiology, Veterinary Medicine and Environmental Health have attended the

memorial lectures organized on his birthday in Houston every April. The details of his scientific, teaching and administrative achievements, as well as of his family life are well described in a 471-page monograph [1].

Possessing good medical knowledge and political skill, as well as visionary and highly creative abilities, Dr Steele became a Father of Veterinary Public Health. He was a brilliant promoter of the philosophy of “One Health”, linking human, animal and environmental health on local, national and global levels to attain optimal health worldwide. Dr Steele’s personality and achievements were best characterized the eulogy presented at his funeral in November 2013 by Dr Myron G. Schultz. “He was an extraordinary man. He was “larger than life” in so many ways: his vision; his leadership; his accomplishments in public health; his worldwide friendship; his mentorships of scores of young acolytes who came within his orbit; his extraordinary memory; his bear hugs; and his longevity were all manifestations of his boundless enthusiasm for life” [2].

Dr Steele enjoyed a very close and long-lasting relationship with Poland. In 1957, he participated in a World Health Organization symposium held in Warsaw to update the veterinary public health problems in Poland. As a result, a joint Polish-American scientific arrangement within US Public Law 480 Program was established in 1959. Due to his initiative, the first common research project on trichinellosis began in 1964 between the CDC, Atlanta, represented by Dr Steele, and the Medical University of Poznan, represented by Professor Czesław Gerwel, the head of the Department of Biology and Medical Parasitology: a collaboration which lasted for 36 years until the year 2000. Control measures of the major parasitic zoonoses endemic in Poland, trichinellosis, *Taenia saginata* taeniosis, giardiasis, toxoplasmosis, toxocarosis, cystic and alveolar echinococcosis, were elaborated

and prepared for implementation [3].

After Dr Steele's retirement, the projects were directed by two American investigators from CDC: Dr Myron G. Schultz and Dr Peter M. Schantz. However, Dr Steele carefully monitored the projects, frequently visiting Poznan on visits to Berlin as a consultant of the German Federal Health Services. It was to his satisfaction, and pleasure, that he could observe the fruit of his labours, the development of a strong joint medical and veterinary university parasitological center in

Poznan, Poland: one that works for "One health" ideology in which he strongly believed.

References

- [1] Carter C.N., Hoobler C.G. 2009. One Man, one medicine, one health: the James Steele story. Published by Craig Nash Carter, ISBN: 1-4392-4004-3.
- [2] Schultz M.G., personal information, 2014.
- [3] Steele J.H. 2000. Polish and American Collaboration on Zoonotic Parasitic Studies, 1960 to 1997. *Military Medicine* 165 (3): 224-227.