This ‘IALP News’ comprises: (1) 80th anniversary of Prof. Karel Vrtička, (2) obituary for Prof. Aatto Sonninen, (3) introduction of a new Affiliate Society to IALP – the Slovenian Association of Logopedics (SAL), and (4) report about the World Voice Day in Russia.

80th Anniversary of Prof. Karel Vrtička, MD

At the symposium ‘Art Voice’ in Prague last year, Prof. Vrtička emphasized the striking similarity of the average frequency of newborn cries with the reference tone a1 (440 Hz) in singing and music. He recalled K. Lorenz’s experiments with wild geese which accepted as their ‘mother’ the first animal they saw when hatched. Prof. Vrtička postulated a fascinating hypothesis of a similar acoustic fixation of the pitch of one’s own newborn cry as a basis for future vocal and musical experience.

In our subconsciousness not only our first cry remains engraved, but it also stores the traces of everything we inherited and of everything that featured our lives.

Karel Vrtička was born in a family of a general practitioner in Hodonín (former Czechoslovakia) on October 15th, 1930 and spent the first half of his life in that country. After medical graduation and basic training in ENT, he joined the team of the Phoniatric Clinic and Laboratory at Charles University in Prague as assistant and later scientific collaborator of Prof. M. Seeman, MD and Ass. Prof. E. Sedláčková, MD. Already in the sixties, Dr. Vrtička published three important texts on the physiology, pathophysiology and acoustic structure of the substitute esophageal voice in Folia Phoniatrica. At the IALP Congress in Padua in 1962, he presented a contribution about the congenitally shortened velum (Sedláčková syndrome).

Dr. Šram met Dr. Vrtička 50 years ago when he came to the Phoniatric Clinic in Prague. At that time, he was responsible for the postgraduate training of numerous Czech and foreign specialists, among them a group of Swiss speech therapists led by H. Nussbaumer-Leuthard. In 1964, he was in charge of the organization of an international ENT Congress focussing on phoniatrics and met there for the first time Prof. K. Graf from Lucerne, Switzerland.

Returning from Lyon, France, where he worked with Prof. J.-C. Lafon, MD and G. Cornut, MD, as ‘assistant étranger de l’Institut d’Audiophonologie’, Dr. Vrtička visited Prof. Graf at his ENT Clinic and met his future collaboratrice G. Ussher-Bürkli and Ass. Prof. C. Schwarz, PhD, as well as some other Swiss speech therapists. On the initiative of Prof. Graf, Dr. Vrtička moved definitively to Switzerland in 1967 with the commitment to found and lead the Phoniatric Division of the ENT Clinic at the Cantonal Hospital in Lucerne. In the early sixties, Prof. R. Luchsinger, MD, a Swiss phoniatrician of world reputation, former president of IALP and co-founder of Folia Phoniatrica, had substantially reduced his professional activities. Only a few enthusiastic Swiss ENT specialists treated phoniatric cases at the time. Thus, the new Phoniatric Department in Lucerne was for years the only specialized phoniatric service in Switzerland working full time. H. Zwahlen, MD, H.-L. Giger, MD, Prof. J. Sopko, MD, A. Sommerhalder, MD, and V. Schweizer, MD, started their postgraduate phoniatric training in Lucerne and offered their support for three international symposia and numerous postgraduate courses. Twenty-five Swiss speech therapists received their clinical training in Lucerne.

In 1968, Prof. Vrtička started lecturing at the University of Fribourg, where he introduced ‘Physiology and Pathophysiology of Verbal Communication’ to hundreds of speech therapists. Dr. Sopko worked with Prof. Vrtička in the years 1974 and 1975 in his Phoniatric Division and accompanied him to his lectures and to international congresses. Together, they presented and published a text on spasmodic dysphonia. Since then, they have remained connected by a close professional and friendly relationship (fig. 1).

Prof. Vrtička, with his collaborators, published more than 90 scientific articles. They performed the very first CT of the pseudodoglottis in laryngectomees and the first clinically relevant CT study of velopharyngeal closure. By proving the identity of the Sedláčková (1955) and Shprintzen (1978) syndromes, Prof. Vrtička highlighted the world priority of his former teacher. The musical tradition of his native country inspired him to numerous texts on the relation of speech and music. He also wrote 80 popular articles covering the whole field of phoniatrics.

Prof. Vrtička is a founder member and honorary member of the Swiss Phoniatric Society and member of the Swiss ENT Society. As individual member of IALP, European Union of Phoniatricians, Société Française de Phoniatrie and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sprach- und Stimmheilkunde, he gave several main lectures and numerous communications at their congresses and at the ‘Stuttgarter Stimmstage’. He was also invited to present a voice seminary at the 1977 convention of the American Speech and Hearing Association in San Francisco.

Prof. Vrtička celebrates his 80th anniversary. For the second half of his life, he has been living in Switzerland. Though retired, he has still been continuing his scientific work. As the highly appreciated former president of IALP, A. Muller, MD suspended his professional activities, Prof. Vrtička has become the present-day doyen of Swiss phoniatricians.

We are grateful to Prof. Vrtička for never having denied his Czech roots. He has always declared himself a scholar of Prof. See-
Pioneer of Voice Research

Prof. Aatto Sonninen died on March 31, 2009 in Jyväskylä, Finland (Fig. 2). He was born on December 24, 1922 in Eastern Finland. For more than 50 years he was a nationally and internationally acclaimed innovator and leader in the research and treatment of voice and speech disorders.

After serving his country in the Second World War, Aatto Sonninen started to study medicine. He also thought of becoming a pianist, and continued playing all his life. For instance, when celebrating his 60th birthday, he gave a piano recital.

Aatto Sonninen [1] defended his doctoral dissertation on the regulation of pitch in 1956. The work continues to have seminal influence in the research of voice physiology. His subsequent research covers many fields in voice, speech and language. Nevertheless, his main focus was the singing and speaking voice. He continued to get deeper in the analysis of the external frame function in the singing and speaking voice [2, 3] and the microdynamics of vocal fold vibration [4]. Some of his latest studies addressed vocal fold strain in singers and nonsingers [5], and support in singing [6]. In 2003, he published a model of the mechanism of vocal fold trauma. He documented the sharp opening of the upper part of the vocal folds, which may cause a whiplike motion leading to structural damage and vocal nodules [7].

Aatto Sonninen's contribution to basic research in the field of professional voice care has undoubtedly influenced later research on voice ergonomics. His scientific career was honored with many awards like the International Gould Award in 1981, the Quintana Award in 1997 and the degree of Professor honoris causa in 1982. In 2002, he was appointed Doctor honoris causa by the University of Oulu, Finland.

Aatto Sonninen did most of his professional work in Jyväskylä, where he founded and developed the Department of Phoniatrics at the Central Hospital of Central Finland. He also had a key role in the founding of several other phoniatric departments in other central hospitals in Finland. In addition, he made an important contribution to founding the university programs in Logopedics and Phoniatrics at the University of Oulu.

Aatto Sonninen was active in international scientific organizations. Among others, he served as the president of the European Union of Phoniatricians and was a long-standing board member of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics.

Aatto Sonninen encouraged young doctoral students to make contacts with other researchers. Many of his younger colleagues remember his advice on how to network in conferences: ‘Go and ask the person next to you: what is your topic? When you get the response, say: how interesting!’ Aatto was an excellent storyteller, especially in his native Eastern Finnish dialect, and he was always at the center of a merry company.

Selected Bibliography

1 Sonninen A: The role of the external laryngeal muscles in length-adjustment of the vocal cords in singing. Acta Otolaryngol Suppl 1956;130:1–102.

New Affiliate Society to IALP: 
Slovenian Association of Logopedics

Društvo logopedov Slovenije (DlogS; Slovenian Association of Logopedics, SAL) was founded on May 20th, 2004. There are approximately 140 logopedists in Slovenia and 103 of them are members of SAL. It is the only national body that represents the needs and interests of logopedists in Slovenia.

The aim of the Association is to connect members and to facilitate their opportunities to pursue knowledge and develop professionally. In the process of creation of legislature, regulations and professional recommendations it promotes the interests and views of the members of the Association. Members of the Association play an important role in graduate and postgraduate education of speech therapists.

The charter, the inner regulations, and the Code of Ethics offer the framework in which the members of the Association function on a voluntary basis. The charter of SAL includes the principles of professional independence and representation.

The organizational bodies of the Association are the General Assembly, Executive Board, Supervisory Board, Honorary Court of Arbitration, Scientific Committee, president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Mrs. Nada Zemva is acting president of SAL.

The association operates under the terms of the Law on Associations of the Republic of Slovenia.

In the past the SAL participated in the organization of the 13th International Aphasia Rehabilitation Conference in Ljubljana in 2008 and the 7th CPLOL Congress in Ljubljana in 2009 on ‘Speech-Language Therapy in Europe: Sharing Good Clinical Practice’.

The upcoming congress of SAL in 2011 will focus on early intervention in speech and language disorders. The SAL organizes numerous events important for the profession, such as the European Speech Therapy Day on March 6 every year.

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Report about the World Voice Day in Russia

Russia joined the Brazilian initiative on celebrating the World Voice Day in 2006. The main issue of the World Voice Day in Russia is drawing attention to the evaluation of conditions of the voice, explaining the influence of bad habits on the voice, the rules of vocal hygiene and the ways of preventing voice organ diseases.

Traditionally, Russia is considered a country with a big cultural heritage. In 2009, in the Russian Federation there were 40 High Schools, 4 of which under the authority of the Ministry of Culture (MoC). There were 1,535 students in higher professional educational institutions studying in voice departments, and 3,435 to become an actor. 1,215 persons were working in the 13 drama theatres, which are also under the authority of the MoC. Under the MoC also fall 358 soloists and 343 actors in 5 musical theatres. In the Russian Federation there are 84 museums and 5,300 scientific employees and guides giving excursions, lectures, and seminars.

More than 753,800 prospective teachers follow courses in 83 High Schools under the authority of the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Russia. Graduated teachers at the schools are representatives of speech-vocal professions. In addition to these official data, there is a large number of actors, singers and other representatives of voice-speech professions working for private companies. The prevalence of diseases of the voice organ is considerable.

The number of cases of throat cancer due to smoking is increasing and patients start smoking earlier. Yearly in Russia 8,000 new patients are diagnosed (Peshetov, 2009).

The general public and doctors are also concerned about the massive distribution of various psychoactive substances. According to statistics, smoking is typical of Russians of different age, sex and nationality, and also of the place of living. More than 60% of Russian men smoke.

Smokers start at a younger age. According to the center of monitoring bad habits among children and teenagers of the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Russia, in 2006–2007 the most alarming category of smokers were children under 10 [Skvortsova and Postnikova, 2008]. On average, in Russia 29.4% of children under 10 start smoking. Among pupils of schools of primary vocational training (15–17 years) 78.3% of boys and 65.4% of girls smoke. Information on the danger of smoking is given to 88.3% of boys and to 94.7% of girls, but knowledge is quite poor. This means that the prevention activities against smoking need to be continued.

For the first time the World Voice Day was organized by the Federal Research Clinical Center of Otorhinolaryngology of the Russian Federal MoH, in cooperation with The Phoniatic Center in the Omsk area.

The danger of smoking among children and adults, the high number of smokers among children, and voice problems in professional voice users have been covered in the media at state level.
Also the annual conference of the Phoniatric Center of the Omsk area and the celebrations on the occasion of its 30th anniversary (on 16th April, 2006) paid attention to these issues.

The central organizer of the World Voice Day in Russia is the Federal Research Clinical Centre of ORL of the MoH and the Section Phoniatrics of the Russian ORL Society.

In 2009, 21 activities were organized in 4 regions of Russia, in 2010, 40 activities in 11 regions. Many famous doctors, actors and the Russian Academy of Voice participated. To name just a few of these activities:

- radio and TV programs dealt with the preventive examinations of persons in speech and voice professions in cultural organizations;
- workshops on voice training and hygiene at pedagogical colleges and universities;
- seminars for workers of philharmonic societies, museums, schools, kindergartens and for other professional voice users;
- the second stage of the First Russian Festival – a competition of speech teachers of Moscow;
- lectures on 'The Damage Caused by Smoking' delivered to schoolboys, students, master classes of vocal teachers, logopedists;
- performances at the 13th competition of readers after Smolensky at the Schukin Theatrical Institute;
- conference of pediatric ENT specialists of Moscow: 'The Voice of a Child';
- conference: 'Do I Hear Your Sonorous and Tender Voice …' for the doctors of sanatoria of the North Caucasus;
- the weekly charitable action 'Pure Voice' in the ENT center of Astrakhan Department of the Federal Research Clinical Center of ORL of the Russian Federation MoH – larynx examination for all attendees;
- seminar: 'Protection of the Voice of Actors of Opera Theatre’ for soloists and choir members of the K.S. Stanislavsky Moscow musical theatre;
- preventive medical examination of children at pubertal age of Moscow for diagnosing diseases of the voice organ;
- scientific-practical conference: 'Actual Questions of Diagnostics and Treatment of Patients with Cancer of the Oropharyngeal Region' in the Samara area;
- scientific-practical conference on problems of voice production in the N.G. Zhiganov Conservatory in Kazan State with a concert of Natalia Pustovaya, Russian national actress, and soloist of the Bolshoi theatre;
- Master classes by voice teachers of the Alfred Schnittke State Institute of Music;
- a seminar: 'Preventive Measures of Dysphonia for Vocalists under the Conditions of an Eventful Concert-Tour Schedule';
- a seminar for soloists and actors of choirs of the A.V. Aleksandrov Academic ensemble of singing and dancing of the Russian Army;
- a seminar: 'Preventive Measures against Dysphonia of Actors of Opera Theatres' for soloists and actors of choirs of the Mariinsky Theatre;
- finally, an ENT scientific-practical conference, 'The Voice and Health', which was organized by the Federal Medical and Biologic Agency of Russia, the Federal Research Clinical Centre of ORL of MoH, and the Section Phoniatrics of the Russian ORL Society. This became a significant event: 211 ORLs, neuropathologists, endocrinologists, logopedists, and gastroenterologists from different Russian towns participated in this conference.

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