

Akademician, prof. dr Miodrag Ostojić

## On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Prof. Dr. Srećko I. Nedeljković, founder and first director of the Institute for Cardiovascular Diseases of the Clinical Center of Serbia

**P**rofessor Srećko I. Nedeljković, the founder and the first Head of the Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases of the Clinical Center of Serbia, former FESC and FACC, passed away on January 2nd 2011, in Belgrade, at the age of 88.

The career of Professor Nedeljkovic is an example of achieving the highest professional aims through hard work, sacrifice and diligence.

Srećko Nedeljković was born on December 4, 1923 in the village of Virovo in Dragačevo (municipality of Arilje) in a farmer's family as the third of nine children of Anka and Ilija Nedeljković. He completed high school in Cacak, and his graduation paper "Creativity is the essence of life" was awarded as the most successful project in his class. Taught by his elder brother Relja, Srećko learns to play chess at the age of 13, what he pursued throughout his High School years in Cacak. In 1946 he enters the School of Medicine of the University of Belgrade where he graduates top in his class, in 1952, with an average grade of 9.3 out of 10. Soon afterwards, he becomes the internal medicine resident at the main University teaching hospital, the Internal Medicine Division B and becomes board certified internal medicine specialist in 1958. Upon the public defense of the nowadays equivalent of Fellowship thesis in Cardiology in 1962, Dr Nedeljkovic got his first appointment as an Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine at the School of Medicine of the University of Belgrade. In 1961 he went to Washington D.C., USA, for further training in biostatistics that was of paramount importance, when in 1962, in cooperation with Academician Professor Božidar Đorđević, he started the Seven Countries Study. It was only three years later, in 1965 that he was the first one to work on experimental models and then application in humans in order to introduce trans-thoracic defibrillation into routine practice. In 1967 he successfully defended his master and in 1969 his PhD thesis. In 1975 he was the visiting professor at Baylor College of Medicine, whose President at the time was a renowned cardiac surgeon Michael E. DeBakey, but he also had established excellent relations with equally brilliant and internationally recognized cardiac surgeon Denton Cooley and his team. Professor Nedeljkovic became full time professor in 1980, and in 1985 the Head of Postgraduate Studies in Cardiology, as well as the president



of Cardiology Society of Yugoslavia. In 1986 he founded the Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases of the Clinical Center of Serbia, in Belgrade, and retired in 1989 as its first Head. In 1990 he became the vice-president of the Medical Academy of Serbian Medical Association and in 1999 the president of the Science Committee of the Yugoslav Association for Atherosclerosis. Despite his official retirement, Professor Srećko Nedeljkovic was active not only as a doctor, but also as researcher and educator of younger colleagues at the Postgraduate Cardiology Studies of the School of Medicine of the University of Belgrade. Along with numerous publications and three editions of postgraduate textbook "Cardiology", where he was the editor-in-chief, along with Academician Vladimir Kanjuh and Primarius Dr Milija Vukotic he continually worked and researched in the Seven Countries Study, as well as JUSAD study (Yugoslav study of atherosclerosis precursors in school children). He also worked in compiling material for Serbian Encyclopedia (editor for the medical section – Vladimir Kanjuh) literally until his very last days. Although he was deeply involved in the Seven Countries Study, as an epidemiology study, he was also

the founder of modern hemodynamics and functional diagnostics in Yugoslavia. This involved modern emergency cardiology, along with electrophysiology. After C. Plavsic and B. Djordjevic, he was the first to introduce heart catheterization in routine practice, as well as left heart catheterization and trans-septal catheterization, followed by selective coronary arteriography. Many of our most distinguished cardiac surgeons, along with worldwide well known cardiac surgeons operated based on the findings of Professor Nedeljkovic's pre-op diagnostics. Selfless in transferring his knowledge to his younger associates, by directing them towards introduction of new methods, Professor Nedeljkovic also very well knew how to delegate responsibilities and how to channel his associates' energy in the right direction. For his work in cardiology, similar to his competitive achievements in chess, he was awarded numerous national and professional awards (Table 1). Factography of Professor Srecko Nedeljkovic's life path is tremendous and will be presented on the Internet site of the Cardiology Society of Serbia and Serbian Heart Foundation as a picture of perfect example of what selfless and dedicated work can achieve and how it can make you not only an exceptionally good cardiologist but one of the most frequently cited among peers (his manuscripts were cited more than 3500 times).

I was lucky enough to have met the international chess master Srecko Nedeljkovic back in 1960, when I was participating in the pioneer chess championship in Belgrade. This short encounter turned into friendship in 1965 when I was selected to play in the Yugoslav state team against USSR in Sochi. As luck would have it, the championship took place in June 1966, when I was supposed to sit exams in my first year of medical studies. I turned to the team captain of Yugoslav chess team, Dr Srecko Nedeljkovic and asked him to help me sit my exams earlier so that I could participate in the chess championship. He did his best to help me, but it was extremely difficult and it turned out that I had to give up the chess championship in order to take my exam. After I completed my studies in 1971, I reported to Academician Professor Božidar Đorđević and Assistant Professor Srećko Nedeljković who welcomed me to their team. I was assigned to Assistant Professor Srecko Nedeljkovic to help him with introduction of new methods.

Ever since I was a medical student, Associate Professor Srecko Nedeljkovic impressed me with his attitude towards patients and his bedside manners. He always had the time to see all the patients, whether they had appointments or not, he always thought that the most important thing was to offer your help when it was most needed. Dr Nedeljkovic was also my doctor of choice when it came to my father's medical care; I was always taken by his energy, warm welcoming manner and altruism that he emanated. Later, when we worked together, my impressions had only grown bigger. A witty character, he also had a particular sense of humor, so he would often comment when his office phone rang: "Ok, let's see who set his mind do get me busy now!" And he never even once refused to help anyone. His office was always unlocked and all of his associates were wel-

comed. But it was not his office only that Srecko shared with his associates. I can remember the time, when, soon after I got my first job and was on a rather limited income, he gave me the keys and directed me to the Nedeljkovic family flat in Herceg Novi, resort at the Adriatic sea, where I spent two weeks with my son and wife. He was all consumed with worry about his associates, and when soon after I started working he told me: "From now on, we'll have a lot to write about each other in our careers", I didn't immediately understand what he meant. However, pretty soon, it dawned on me that professional endeavors entail a lot of traps too, and that teacher-student loyalty is the key element in overcoming some difficult situations that all of us encounter. As an illustration of his care about his students, it suffices to mention that in 1994, without telling me anything, he recommended to Medical Academy of the Serbian Medical Association that I become a correspondent member of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts on behalf of Serbian Medical Association. It is with his persistent engagement and with invaluable contribution of Academicians Vladimir Kanjuh and Isidor Papo that this proposal was accepted. I have often said, in chess terms, that by pushing the pawn to the front he managed to turn it into a queen. That was how Srecko taught us that everybody should be given a chance to achieve a successful career, but also that not everyone responds the same way when presented with this opportunity ("Everyone deserves to live", and "I'll write a book—Hippocrates and all his students"). His key postulate was, and he used to say it in English: "Hard working-soft speaking". This was his Gandhi-like understanding of how to overcome obstacles that would often appear on his way. I remember the time when he worked hard to secure the funds for the new catheterization room. He called me and said: "Ostojic, do you know how president Tito led the IV offensive during the second World War? He said—we'll go through Prozor (Prozor is the name of the city which means "window" in English)." And our new catheterization room did go through the window and was built as an additional part of the existing building.

I could write about Srecko as a man, mentor, friend, doctor, instructor, scientist, chess player, head of family, but all these roles blend together into one person as colors do when forming a unique rainbow. Whichever role I decide to set aside, it wouldn't do justice to a man that Srecko really was. He appreciated and loved others, and it seems that they returned his affection and care. He was always satisfied and happy with what he achieved; he was modest, but never defensive. He recovered from his heart surgery (CABG) quicker than some would recover from a common cold, he only remained at hospital for 72 hours, and just before his serious leg surgery only several days before he died, when we told him that a radical procedure will be inevitable, he replied in his witty way: "That's just fine, we did it to our patients, too!". Srecko Nedeljkovic lived bravely and honorably and when he left us, he did it the same way again. A pessimist would say it's a pity that we lost him, I—however—as one of his students whom he supported and gave a chance to form one of the biggest world known cardiologists.

## Srećko I. Nedeljković: Awards and recognition

1.	Government of Serbia Award for best graduation essay "Work and creation is the meaning of life"	1943
2.	International chess master (first place at first international tournament in Belgrade and international tournament in Vienna)	1950
3.	Gold medal at the Olympics in Dubrovnik	1950
4.	Ranked as 43 on a world chess list	1955
5.	Yugoslav Exceptional Sportsman	1957
6.	October Award by the City of Belgrade for scientific achievements	1970 and 1981
7.	7th of July Award for improvements in Serbia development	1979
8.	Order of Achievement with gold wreath	1986
9.	Gold medal of Yugoslav Association of Cardiologists	1989
10.	Two gold medals of the Faculty of Medicine, Belgrade University, for improvements in post graduation cardiology curriculum	1985 and 1995
11.	Serbian Medical Association Life Achievement Award	1993
12.	Editor of chess section of Viva magazine	1996
13.	Serbian Patriarch Pavle's Award	2000 and 2004
14.	Grand Seal of Serbian Medical Association	2003
15.	Plaque of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art	2000
16.	National sport award for special contribution to development and affirmation of sports by the Government of Republic of Serbia	2007
17.	Patron of the students' final chess tournament of University of Belgrade (Verica and Srećko Nedeljković's Trophy)	2008

ogy team (performing about 2800 percutaneous coronary interventions per year) at Division of Cardiology, Clinical Center of Serbia, would like to preserve my Mentor's never ending optimism and say – we are happy to have had such a man for our teacher, mentor and friend.

Ideas and standards that he set will remain alive for years to come. Srećko was not only a doctor, teacher, scientist, chess player; **he was an extraordinarily wise man**. The bar he set for us is so high that the hard work to make it, is only yet to come.

