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Since 1996 Ieva Pukite (who writes under the name Ieva Puķe) is a journalist for the largest national daily newspaper *Diena*. She has written also for the travel magazine *Cemodans*, the intellectual magazine *Rīgas Laiks* and the analytical magazine 'r'. She has covered a wide array of topics from business news to feature articles on medicine, articles on travel, restaurant reviews and research about various socio economic issues. Most often the focus of her articles is a person - from simple Latvian farmer to adventurers met during travels, from the socially excluded to the president of Latvia. Currently Ieva Pukite is the editor of *Diena's* lifestyle section. She is the author of two travel books - *Sunday Island* (about the Aboriginal Australia) and *Icelanders: between glaciers and lava* (about the first state to recognise Latvia's renewed independence).



Teksts — Ieva Puķe, speciāli Ir  
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# Sarežģītais zvirbulēns

Remantadīna izgudrotājs **Jānis Polis** ir palīdzējis tūkstošiem cilvēku. Viņa paša veselības problēmas šobrīd nevar atrisināt neviens

**V**INŠ IR IT KĀ SALIKTS no divām daļām. Žirgtas, sarunā ieinteresētas acis zem puiciski paspiruša sirmo matu ērkņa un... baltām saitēm līdz ceļgalam noītas, slimnīcas halāta piesegtas kājas, piepampus kā bluķi. Tā vien šķiet, ka antibiotiku un glikozes šķīdumi, kuru rezervuāri manas viesošanās laikā pie Jaņa Poļa rokas pieslēgtajā sistēmas statīvā tiek mainīti līdzīgi patronu lentām, izskrien caur viņa ķermeņi, nekur neaizķerdamies.

Viņš ignorē caur apsejēm uz grīdas krājošos limfas šķidrums pelņi, un lūdz padot divas grāmatas. «Tai vajadzētu būt katra inteliģenta cilvēka ģimenē,» – uz vienvietīgas palātās galda blakus radioaparātam, vairākām ūdens pudelēm un mazam Jēzus Kristus attēlam vispirms tiek nolikta nesen izdotā Marinas Kosteņeckas sarakste ar Gulagā ieslodzīto tēvu. «Šo man Stradiņjānis

**Ls 160 pensijai pieplusotā zinātnieka stipendija krīzes dēļ samazināta uz pusi. Viņa izgudrotais remantadīns iekasē miljonus**

nupat uzdāvināja, tur ir iekšā liels raksts par mani,» virs Kosteņeckas grāmatas gultas P.Stradiņa Medicīnas vēstures muzeja 2010.gada rakstu krājums.

Lasu: «Pasaules Intelektuālā īpašuma organizācija Ženēvā 2008.gada nogalē Latvijas Organiskās sintēzes institūtam (OSI) piešķirusi inovatīva uzņēmuma balvu, bet tā kādreizējam darbiniekam Jānim Polim par pretvīrusu preparāta remantadīna radīšanu un ieviešanu – izcila izgudrotāja zelta medaļu.»

**NO SOCIĀLĀS MĀJAS UZ SLIMNĪCU**  
«Jānis Polis? Nē, tāda te nav... Polis? Virietis? Pameģiniet piezvanīt uz citu numuru,» mediķu balsis telefona klausulē mani ir «izfutbolējušas» cauri četrām slimnīcas *Bīķernieki* nodaļām. Visbeidzot apstiprināšanu atbildi dod Āpdegumu centrs, uz kuru meklētais cilvēks pārvests iepriekšējā dienā. Sazvanīts palātā, kur pirmo reizi garajā hospitalizācijas laikā ir viens, Jānis Polis ir ar mieru tīkties kaut uz līdzenas vietas. ▶

Kopš 2000.gada, kad «pretgripas bumbas» tēvu intervēju pēc Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas (LZA) goda doktora nosaukuma piešķiršanas, neesmu par viņu neko dzirdējis. Toreiz viens no spožākajiem Latvijas zinātnes prātiem saņēma 53 latus lielu pensiju un paceltās ires maksas dēļ bija spiests atstāt dzīvokli privātipašnieka mājā. Žurnālistu, galvenokārt *Latvijas Radio* darbinieces Baibas Šābertes, un arī LZA kolēģu saceltās kņadas dēļ viņam ierādīja mitekli sociālajā mājā.

Pēdējā laika notikumi ir sagriezušies vēl dramatiskākā virpulī. Apstākļi, ka nopietnās kāju vēnu problēmas 72 gadus vecais Polis nerisina vientulībā, bet turpina atrasties mediķu aprūpē, zināma loma ir citai žurnālistei, laikraksta *Vesti Segodna* autorei Jeļenai Šlusarevai. Īsi pirms Jāņa Poļa izrakstīšanas viņas uzrunātais slimnīcas *Biķernieki* galvenais ārsts Zigmunds Kovaļčuks ir sazvanijs uzņēmuma *Olainfarm* vadību, kas piekritusi finansēt Poļa turpmāko ārstēšanu, raksta 8.septembra laikraksts. Slimnieka šā brīža pensijai – Ls 160 – pieplusoto emeritēta zinātnieka stipendiju krīzes budžeta grieziens no Ls 200 samazinājis uz pusi, taču viņš ir varējis atļauties par manipulācijām *Biķerniekos* maksāt prasītos Ls 9,50 dienā.

Tomēr slimnīca viņa vajadzībām realitātē ir tērējusi četras reizes vairāk un ir izsmēlusi kvotu, ko gada laikā šiem nolūkiem kompensē valsts. Pirmoreiz hospitalizēts jau 1.jūlijā, Jānis Polis pēc 16 dienām palaists mājās, taču 27.jūlijā atgriezies vēl smagākā stāvoklī. Viņa apakšstilbi ir kļāti nedzīstošām, sāpošām brūcēm, bijušais sporta meistars rītenbraukšanā var tikai tīpināt, atbalstoties uz bambusa spieķa. Līdz šim lietotie medikamenti nav būtiski palīdzējuši zinātniekam, kura izgudrotās zāles radija apvērsumu gripas ārstēšanā Padomju Savienībā un joprojām ieņem stabili vietu aptieku plauktos.

Uzņēmumā *Olainfarm* pirms 34 gadiem sāka remantadīna ražošana ir vērienīgs bizness. To, godinot Jāni Poli par Ženēvas medaļas saņemšanu, iezīmējis arī LZA Senāta priekšsēdētājs Jānis Stradiņš: «Arī šodien tas joprojām ir viens no šajā firmā ražotajiem pamatpreparātiem. To patērē Latvijā (ap 10–12% no ražošanas apjoma), eksportē uz Krieviju, Baltkrieviju, Kazahstānu, Bulgāriju, Lietuvu, Moldovu, Uzbekiju, Gruziju (...), arī Poliju un Čehiju. *Olainfarm* ražošanas apjoms ir 5,5 miljoni iepakojumu gadā (2008.), eksporta vērtība ik gadus sniedzas daudzos miljonos latu. Tā arī ir viena no Latvijas intelektuālajām eksportprecēm, ko lieto ne tikai pret A tipa gripas vīrusu, bet arī pret ērcu encefalīta izraisītāju. Tiesa, remantadīna cena arvien pieaug, un pašlaik dažās aptiekās tas maksā jau astoņus latus.»

Pagājušogad, remantadīna sintezēšanas 40.gadadienā, preparātu ar līdzīgu nosaukumu *Rimantadine-Grindeks* sāka ražot arī otra Latvijas farmācijas rūpnīca.

Diemžēl, 70.gadu Padomju Savienībā izdotās autorapliecības šiem uzņēmumiem nav saistošas, izgudrotājam no tiem oficiāli nepienākas nekās.

#### BREŽNEVA LABVĒLĪBA

Jāņa Poļa dzīvē ir daudz retorikas. «Pazudušā dēla» atgriešanās dzimtajā institūtā, kaut uz pāris stundām – gandrīz vai Bībeles stāsta sižets,» tā Ženēvas medaļas pasniegšanu 2009.gada 6.februārī vērtē Jānis Stradiņš. Pēc smaidošajām gaviļnieka godināšanas fotogrāfijām nekad nepateiks, ka zinātnie-

mākslinieka Aleksandra Zviedra gleznas, par laimi, grāmatu atbalstījis Sorosa fonds.

Izrādās, ar Marīnu Kosteņecku viņu vieno ne tikai darbs Organiskās sintēzes institūtā, bet arī dziļi personiska stīga. «Mans tētis bija leģionārs, notiesāts uz 25 plus pieci. Ne tikai Sibīrijā, arī Rietumu lēģeros. Viņš varēja tur palikt, bet tomēr brauca atpakaļ, un 1953.gadā viņu atkal paņēma.» Tēvam pārnākot mājās, Jānis Polis bijis jau trešā kursa students. Viņš nerunā par pēckara gadu trūkumu, arī tūdaļ pēc augstskolas izslimoto tuberkulozi piemin tikai garāmejot, bet izstāsta anekdotisku gadījumu par savā mūžā pirmo uzvalku.

Dēlam beidzot vidusskolu, mamma pie Sesavas lauku skrodera atļāvusies pašūt biezas vadmalas ancuku ar biksēm, kuras «kā nolika, tā stāvēja», par ko pusim Rīgā bijis kauns. Taču, kad nistajam apģērba gabalam uzgāzusies verdoša sērskābe un bikšu virskārta pārvērtusies putrā, Polis paspējis tās atpogāt un, «pateikdamies Dievam un mamiņai», nomest uz grīdas.

Šī epizode nosacīti ir viņa zinātniskā darba sākums. «Sēžu studentu kopmītnē treniņtērpā. Profesors Vanags saka puišiem: «Pasakiet Polim, lai viņš atnāk pie manis!» – «Es zinu, ka jūs protat šo to sintezēt. Man ļoti vajag puskilogramu šitādas vielas. Nāciet manā kabinetā un uztaisiet!» Trīs četrās dienās uztaisīju, un profesors man iedeva 300 rubļus. Miļš paldies! Nāca Ziemassvētki, es nopērku uzvalku, kurpes, kreklus, slīpsi, tā kā dendijs jūtos: eju uz Jaungada balli un lekcijām.»

Vēl lielāku pakalpojumu savulaik Polim izdarījis toreizējais OSI direktors Solomons Hillers, izglābdams viņu no nosūtīšanas darbā uz Līvanu spirta brūzi un radīdams vislabvēlīgākos apstākļus adamantāna (ogļūdeņraža ar simetrisku molekulas struktūru) atvasinājumu veidošanai, no kuriem pazīstamākais ir pretvīrusu preparāts remantadīns.

Ceļu uz PSRS Ministru padomes priekšsēdētāja Alekseja Kosigina un paša komunistiskās partijas vadītāja Leonīda Brežņeva labvēlību Polis izlauzīs ar lielu pārdošību: 1976.gadā, PSKP XXV kongresa laikā padzirdējis, ka kompartijas bosī debatē par gripas epidēmiju izraisītajiem darbaspēka zaudējumiem, viņš no Rīgas galvenā pasta pašam Brežņevam nosūtīja telegrammu par tolaik vēl neatzīstā remantadīna esamību. «Lai cik tas nebūtu komiski, jo man ir tikai ķimīķa izglītība, to projektū, kā tagad saka, vadiju es,» viņš atceras savu zvaigzņu stundu. «Visā PSRS kontrolēju klīniskās un epidemioloģiskās pārbaudes, toksikoloģiju, kancerogenitāti. Desmitiem tūkstoši cilvēku katrs deva savus rezultātus, tie visi nonāca farmkomitejā.»

#### GAISMA TUNELĀ GALĀ?

«Ļoti ielaists slimnieks, kurš nav mērķtieciģi nonācis tur, kur būtu jānonāk,» tik ļoti ar Jāņa Poļa biogrāfijas detaļām kontrastē slimnīcas *Biķernieki* ķirurgs Ulda Biernāna vārds.



Pat slimnīcas palātā Jānis Polis ir priecīgs sarunu biedrs. «Meitenes, es bišu jūsu Ziemassvētku vecīti!» viņš solījis ķirurģiskās nodaļas māsīņām. «Mācieties katra pa pantiņam!»

«Mani trīsreiz vienā dienā izsēdināja no tramvaja... Nu, smirdēju»

kam jau tad uz apakšstilbiem bija sulojošas brūces un apbalvojumu viņš saņēma, kā pats sarkastiski nosmej, «slapjos zābakos».

Arī tagad, slimnīcas palātā viņš ir priecīgs sarunu biedrs. Nepievērsdams nekādu uzmanību monotonajai zāļu pilēšanai sistēmas vados, nebeidz cīlāt Marinas Kosteņeckas grāmatu: «Paskatieties, cik tā ir izcili izdota! Bezgala skaista, laba grāmata.»

Vasarā, izrāvies no slimnīcas, viņš ar tās autori esot ieēdis kūku, nosvinēdams šī darba iznākšanu – par spīti finansējuma problēmām. Lai palīdzētu Marīnai, esot bijis gatavs pārdot savā īpašumā esošās drauga,

Komplicētā pacienta uzraudzība kopš jūlija ir bijusi vairāku šīs iestādes mediķu rokas, dakterim Biernānam ir visilgākais «stāžs».

Karstā vasara nav labvēlīgi ietekmējusi hroniskas limfovenoza nepietiekamības radīto čūlu sadziedēšanu, turklāt Poļa nopāšanai *Biķerniekos* ir divu gadu vēsture. «2009.gada 17.septembrī man piedzima mazmazmeitiņa. Gribēju iet ciemos, bet sākas baigas sāpes,» atceras pats slimnieks. «Tad 21.novembrī nomira OSI direktors Edmunds Lukēvics un tajā naktī man vienai kājai pārplīsa vēna. Nostopēju, aizgāju uz bērēm, pirmdienā sākās baigā pampšana. Stradiņos taisīja simtiem analīžu, rezultāti labi. Pēc daktera Jura Vecvagara ieteikuma par kādiem 70 latiem uztaisījām arī visas iespējamās analīzes, lai pierādītu, ka nekur nav vēzis... mierīgi rullēju tālāk. Tad gadījās Balvos, kur laba klinika, pie profesora Līgas Krasovskas. Parakstīja urindzenošos līdzekļus, nekas nemainījās. Janvārī liktenis savēda kopā ar [ekstrasensu] Jāni Lielo, tas pa telefonu pēc kādas trešās reizes palaista to tecēšanu,» viņš ātri slid pāri mēnešiem un gadiem.

«Sākumā tecēja limfa un fizioloģiskais, pēkšņi sāka tecēt etiķskābe un skudrskābe, visas aminoskābes, urīnviela. Tas bija baigi, svīlināja pēdas, ka nezin, kur likties.»

Vai sadzīvē tik plašās ķīmijas zināšanas nekļūst par apgrūtinājumu, uzdodu muļķīgu jautājumu. «No otras puses, labi,» atbild Jānis Polis. «Noplēs nost tās lupatas un nomazgā ar ūdeni vārāmo sāli nost. Ja no ūdens paliek slikti, mazgā, teiksim, ar *Karalavotu ūdeni*. Liek tikai aplikācijas un ņem tik nost! Man bija tāds noskaņojums — ejiet jūs visi ratā, es redzu gaismu tuneļa galā, es pats tikšu galā! Kādas astoņas kārtas jau biju nodzinis, pirms tam tās kājas bija kā zilonmātei.» No 27.jūlija līdz pat šai dienai viņš tomēr savu veselību atkal uzstādījis *Biķernieku* mediķiem.

«Mani trīsreiz vienā dienā izsēdināja no tramvaja... tad man pieleca, ka es vakarā izsaukšu ātros, lai ved mani šurp,» stāsta sirmais solīdais vīrietis. «Kāpēc izsēdināja?» esmu neizpratnē. «Nu, smirdēju. Tad man kājās bija tārpī. Kad pirmoreiz ienācu slimnīcā, bija tā, ka visas sanitāres un māsas pagība. Uzņemšanā man teica: «Ej vannasistabā un cīnies. Cik tev vajag, mazgā pats!» Lūdzu Dievu, raudāju, brēcu... Beigās iztīrīju. Saku: «Nu ko jūs uztraucaties: Ķīnā brūces speciāli tā dziedē. Speciālās rūpnīcās audzē.»

«Pats jāvāt, lai tā notiek?» esmu šokēta. «Nē, es nezināju, tikai kājas baigi smirdēja, un kaut kas tur kņudēja. Es jau pats neredzu, kas teiksim, tur lejā notiek,» atbild spartiskais vīrs. Viņš pats sevi raksturo kā «tipu, kas nelieto pretāpju un miega līdzekļus, un dakteriem sagādā ļoti daudz raizju, jo acis pasaka: es nebūšu dārzenis.»

#### SOCIĀLA PROBLĒMA?

«Tā ir valsts vaina, sociāla problēma — viņam ir vajadzīga kopšana, nevis ārstēšana.



Jānis Polis ar molekulu modeli Rīgas domes piešķirtajā dzīvoklī sociālajā mājā 2006.gadā



Pērn februārī, saņemot Pasaules Intelektuālā īpašuma organizācijas piešķirto zelta medaļu par izgudrojumiem medicīnās ķīmijā. Attēlā: ar Latvijas Organiskās sintēzes institūta direktoru Ivaru Kalviņu

Antibiotikas var dzert arī mājās. Mums slimnīcā guļ ārkārtīgi daudz cilvēku, kam nevajadzētu te gulēt. Šis vienkārši ir ļoti uzskatāms gadījums,» apgalvo slimnīcas amatpersona, kas gan nevēlas, lai vārds tiktu publicēts.

«Jā, tā ir liela problēma, kur cilvēkam iet pārsiet brūces pēc tam, kad viņu izraksta no slimnīcas. Labi, var vienreiz dienā uz polikliniku pieskriet. Bet sestdienās un svētdienās daudzas poliklinikas

neestrādā.» Īpaši grūti ir vientuļiem pacientiem, ko ierobežo finanses un slimība ilgstadiem, ir apgrūtinātas kustības. Jāņa Poļa gadījumā ir sastapušies visi šie faktori. Plus neordināra personība, kuras neatkarības alkas šādā situācijā sāk kļūt par atkarību. Arī mediķi ir pamanījuši, ka viņš ietur distanci pat no abiem saviem dēliem.

«Ļoti apdāvināts, temperamentīgs, ar maksimālu taisnības izjūtu, pozitīvs, bet sinusoidāls cilvēks,» par bijušo kolēģi saka Jānis Stradiņš, kam Jānis Polis 80.gadu deficīta laikā gripas profilaksei nesis pašrocīgi sintezētus remantadīna pulverišus. Šī medikamenta uzvaras gājienu akadēmiķis uzskata par perfektu apstākļu sakrītību: ķīmiķa aizrautība plus totalitāras lielvalsts specifika: «Ja Polis remantadīnu būtu izgudrojis neatkarīgā Latvijā, tas nebūtu «aizgājis» — epidemioloģiskos izmēģinājumus var īstenot tikai lielos apmēros. Maskavas ierēdņi bija labvēlīgi, tika iesaistīts viss Ļeņingradas apgabals!»

Taču Poļa stūrģalvība ilgi nav ļāvusi Latvijas brīvvalstij visnotaļ lojālo ķīmiķi pierunāt nostrificētības — pielīdzināt savu zinātnisko grādu jaunajai akadēmiskajai sistēmai, lai arī tam bijušas finansiālas sekas. «Es teicu — šālē tu dillē! Tie, kas taisīja disertācijas par partizāniem un kolhoziņu cīņām, lai tie nostrificējas. Bet adamantānu ķīmijā nekas nav mainījies,» man ar lepnumu apstiprinājis arī pats aprunātais.

Jaunie laiki Jānim Polim nav nesuši neko labu. «Sociāla problēma,» šo vārdu savienojumu viņa sakarībā lieto arī Jānis Stradiņš. «Polis ir nokļuvis traģiskā situācijā. Izgudrotājs Latvijas Republikā ir neaizsargāts, gan viņa attiecības ar ražotājiem, gan patenta tiesības likumdošanā ir nesakārtotas. Mums turklāt nav daudz cilvēku, kuri būtu izgudrojuši tik efektīvu preparātu kā Jānis Polis.»

Tikpat aizrautīgi kā kādreiz remantadīnu, ķīmijas patriarhs gan tagad visiem iesaka *Vision* uztura bagātinātājus — man līdz atmākušais fotogrāfs saņem pāris mikstūras, ko augustā pats kompānijas prezidents dāvinājis uzņēmuma mitiņa dalībniekiem Maskavā. Arī Jānis Polis nopircis ceļā biļetes, bet nav ticis kāju dēļ, tomēr uz Latviju pienācis ķēdes kompānijas sūtījums.

Slimnīcā viņa dienas ir piepildītas, kaut gan sajūta esot kā Nezinītīm Saules pilsētā — *Olainfarm* pārstāvji ar viņu par turpmākās ārstēšanas finansēšanu pagaidām nav sazinājušies. «Meitenes, es būšu jūsu Ziemassvētku veciņis!» viņš solījis ķīruģiskās nodaļas māsiņām. «Mācieties katra pa pantiņam!»

Man viņš krievu valodā emocionāli deklamē rindas no armēņu dzejnieka Griģora Narekaci *Sēru grāmatas* par vientuļo mūku ar pūstošām brūcēm. Projām ejot saņemtu lapu ar 1938. — Jāņa Poļa dzimšanas gadā — Elzas Kezberes rakstīto patriotisko *Lūģšanu*, ko ķīmiķis skaitījis gan trimdas dzejniekam Andrejam Eglītim Akadēmiskajā bibliotēkā, gan 80.gadu beigās Aglonā, Tautas frontes sanāksmē: «Latvijā! Svētīts lai mūžam tavš vārds...» ●

## Translation

### **Talented but difficult**

***The inventor of remantadine, Jānis Polis, has helped thousands of people. Yet, there is no one who can currently solve his own health problems***

It is as if he has been assembled from two parts. Lively eyes, showing an interest in our conversation, look out from underneath a boyishly ragged mop of thick grey hair and ... he has legs swollen thick as tree trunks, underneath a hospital gown, tied down to the kneecaps with white ties. It just seems that the liquid antibiotics and glucose from the IV BAGS attached to Polis's arm, which they change during my visit like cartridge belts, flow straight through his body and out again. He ignores the puddle of lymph collecting on the ground through his dressings, and asks me to hand him two books. 'The family of every intelligent person should have this,' he says of the first book – the recently published correspondence between Marina Kosteņeckā and her father while he was a prisoner of the Gulag – which he places on the table of his single-bed ward next to a radio, several bottles of water and a small image of Jesus Christ. Of the second – the 2010 edition of collected writings from the Pauls Stradiņš Museum of the History of Medicine – he observes: 'this is a gift that Jānis Stradiņš has just given me; it has an article about me in it'. I read: 'At the end of 2008, the World Intellectual Property Organisation in Geneva awarded the Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis (OSI) its award for innovative enterprises and the OSI's former staff member, Jānis Polis, the Outstanding Inventor gold medal for his invention and introduction of the antiviral preparation remantadine.'

### **From social housing to hospital**

'Jānis Polis? No, there's no one of that name here ... Polis? Male? Try calling another number,' is the response I had down the telephone line as medical staff from four departments in the Biķernieki hospital passed me like a football from one to the other. Finally, I got an affirmative answer from the Burns Centre, to which the person I was looking for had been transferred the previous day. When I managed to speak to him in the ward where, for the first time in his long period of hospitalisation, he had a room to himself, Jānis Polis was willing to see me at once. Since 2000, when I interviewed the 'father of the anti-flu bomb' after he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Latvian Academy of Sciences (LZA), I had heard nothing more about him. At that time, one of Latvia's brightest scientific minds was receiving a pension of LVL 53 (about EUR 75) and was forced to leave his flat in a privately owned building following a rent increase. After an uproar provoked by some journalists, chiefly Baiba Šāberte from Radio Latvia, and also colleagues from the LZA, he was found accommodation in social housing. Recent events have taken an even more dramatic turn. The fact that 72-year-old Polis, who suffers from serious leg vein problems, does not have to cope with them alone but remains under medical supervision is to a certain

degree thanks to another journalist, Jeļena Sļusareva, the *Vesti Segodnya* columnist. Shortly before Polis was to be discharged, the Chief Medical Officer at Biķernieki, Zigmunds Kovaļčuks, whom she had approached, rang the management of the medical company, *Olainfarm*, which agreed to finance his continuing treatment, according to *Vesti Segodnya* of 8 September. Although his additional stipend as scientist emeritus of LVL 200 had been reduced by half in the budget cuts, Polis had been able, with the help of his current ordinary pension of LVL 160, to afford to pay the LVL 9.50 per day charge for his treatment. However, in actual fact, the hospital had been spending four times as much as that on his case and had outspent the annual quota that was reimbursable by the state in these circumstances. Admitted for the first time on 1 July, Jānis Polis was discharged after 16 days, but returned on 27 July in an even worse condition. His lower legs are covered in painful sores that will not heal; this former cycling champion can only shuffle along with the aid of a bamboo cane. The drugs he has taken so far have not really been able to help the condition of the scientist who invented the drug that caused a revolution in the treatment of influenza in the Soviet Union and still finds a steady place on pharmacy shelves.

The manufacture of remantadine, which it began 34 years ago, is big business for *Olainfarm*. This was also noted by the President of the Senate of the LZA, Jānis Stradiņš, when, in honouring Jānis Polis for his gold medal from Geneva, he wrote: 'This [remantadine] is still one of this company's basic preparations. It is consumed in Latvia (about 10% to 12% of production by volume) and exported to Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Georgia (...), and also Poland and the Czech Republic. *Olainfarm* produces 5.5 million packs a year (2008). In 2004, production was 1.7 million – demand has grown!). The exports are worth millions every year. It is also one of Latvia's intellectual exports, used not only against the influenza A virus but also against the cause of tick-borne encephalitis. It is true that the price of remantadine is constantly increasing, and the price of a pack at the chemist can be as high as LVL 8.' Last year, on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the synthesis of remantadine, manufacture of a preparation with a similar name – Rimantadine-Grindeks – began at another Latvian pharmaceuticals manufacturer. Unfortunately, patent certificates issued by the Soviet Union in the 1970s are not binding on these companies, and the inventor is not officially entitled to any payment whatsoever in respect of them.

### **Son of a Latvian legionary, protégé of Brezhnev**

There is much rhetoric in the life of Jānis Polis. 'The return of the "prodigal son" to his own institute, albeit for a few hours only, is almost like a Biblical parable' was how Jānis Stradiņš described it at the 'Geneva medal' awards ceremony on 6 February 2009. You can't tell from the smiling photographs of the ceremony in honour of the prizewinner that the scientist already had suppurating sores on his legs. He received the award, as he himself sarcastically notes, 'in wet boots'.

Even now, in his hospital ward, he is cheerful company. As an abstraction from the monotonous drip, drip of the medication into his system, he cannot stop picking up Marina Kostanecka's book. 'Look, what a splendid edition. An endlessly handsome, good book.' Last summer, having torn himself away from his hospital bed, he and the author had shared a cake together to celebrate the publication of her book, in spite of his financing problems. To help Marina, he had been prepared to sell paintings he owned by his friend, the artist Aleksandrs Zviedris. Fortunately, the book received a grant from the Soros Foundation. As it happens, he and Marina Kostanecka are linked not only through work at OSI, but also by a deeply personal thread. 'My father was a member of the Latvian Legion and was sentenced to 25 years +5 – not only in Siberia but also in labour camps in the western USSR. He could have stayed out there, but nevertheless he came back, and in 1953 they took him again.' When his father finally came home, Jānis Polis was already a third-year student. He doesn't refer to the post-war shortages, and only mentions the tuberculosis he contracted just after finishing university in passing, but does tell me an anecdote about his first-ever suit. When her son graduated from secondary school, his mother stretched to ordering a thick homespun jacket and trousers for him from the local country tailor in Sesava. The trousers were thick enough to stand up by themselves, and the boy was ashamed of them when in Riga. However, when a container of boiling sulphuric acid was spilled on the hated piece of clothing, and the upper layer of the trousers was reduced to a porridge, Polis had time to unbutton them and, 'thanks be to God and my mother', throw them onto the floor. This episode definitely marked the start of his scientific work. 'I was sitting in the student hostel in my tracksuit. Professor Vanags said to the lads: "Tell Polis to come and see me."' – 'I believe you know how to synthesise one or two things. I desperately need half a kilogram of this substance. Come to my office and make it!' I managed to make it up in three or four days, and the professor gave me 300 roubles. Thank you very much! When Christmas came round, I bought a suit, shoes, a shirt and tie. I felt like a dandy, going to the New Year dance and lectures ...'

Polis was done an even greater service by the director of the OSI, Solomons Hillers, who saved him from being sent to work at the Līvāni spirits distillery, and created the most favourable conditions for the manufacture of adamantane (a hydrocarbon with a symmetrical molecular structure) derivatives, of which the most well-known is the antiviral preparation remantadine.

It was by an audacious move of his own that Polis forged his pathway to the favour of the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, Alexei Kosygin, and of Leonid Brezhnev himself. In 1976, during the 25<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU, Polis, having got to hear that the Communist Party bosses were having a discussion of losses among the workforce due to epidemics of influenza, sent a telegram from the General Post Office in Riga to Brezhnev himself on the existence of remantadine, which had yet to be approved at that time.



'However bizarre it may seem, I was in charge of that project, as they now say, even though my degree is only in chemistry,' he remembers his hour of stardom. 'I controlled the clinical and epidemiological trials, toxicology, and cancerogenicity, throughout the entire USSR. Tens of thousands of people each sent in their results, and they were all passed to the pharmacology committee, "pharmcom".'

### **Light at the end of the tunnel?**

A very neglected patient, who was not sent to where he should appropriately have been sent' – those are the words of Uldis Biernāns, a surgeon at the Biķernieki hospital, and stand in such great contrast to the details of Jānis Polis's biography. Since 1 July, the treatment of this complicated patient has been managed by several medics in that institution; Dr Biernāns is the longest serving. The hot summer has not been favourable to the healing process of the trophic ulcers caused by his chronic lymphovenous insufficiency. What is more, Polis's admission to Biķernieki has a two-year history. 'My greatgreat granddaughter was born on 17 September 2009. I wanted to visit but I had an attack of severe pain ...' the patient himself remembers. 'Then [on 21 November], the director of the OSI, Edmunds Lukēvics, died and that night, I burst a vein in my leg. I managed to stop the bleeding, went to the funeral, but the following Monday this terrible swelling began. I had hundreds of tests at the Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital; the results were good. At the suggestion of Dr Juris Vecvagars for about LVL 70 they gave me all the possible tests to prove there was no cancer anywhere ... so I carried on serenely. Then I happened to be in Balvi, where there is a very good clinic, under Professor Līga Krasovska. She prescribed me some diuretics; there was no change. In January, fate threw me together with Jānis Lielais [the psychic]. By telephone, on about the third occasion, he started off the discharge.' He glides rapidly over the months and years. 'At the beginning, I was shedding lymph fluid and physiological liquids; then all of a sudden, acetic acid and formic acid, all the amino acids, and urea started pouring out. It was horrible, it was scalding my feet so badly, I didn't know what to do.' I ask a stupid question: 'Doesn't such broad knowledge of chemistry become a burden in day-to-day life?' 'On the other hand, it's good,' replies Jānis Polis. 'You tear off the rags and wash off the salt with water. If the water makes you feel bad, wash with, say, Karaļavotu [a Latvian mineral] water. Just apply mineral-water dressings, and take them off. I saw it like this – you can all go to hell, I can see the light at the end of the tunnel, I'll manage on my own! I had already worked off some eight layers, before that my legs were like an elephant cow's.' From 27 July to this day, however, he has again entrusted his health to the medics at Biķernieki.

'I was put off the tram three times ... then it came to me that in the evening, I should call out the emergency services to take me here,' this grey-haired, respectable man tells me. 'Why did they put you off?' I ask in incomprehension. 'Well, because I stank. At that point, I had worms in my legs. When I first arrived

at the hospital, I made all the orderlies and nurses faint. At reception, they told me: 'Go to the bathroom and see to it yourself. Go bathe yourself, as much as you need.' I prayed to God, I cried, I wailed ... In the end, I managed to cleanse the sores. I say "What's the problem? In China, that's how they treat wounds specially. They grow them in special factories." 'You yourself let this happen?' I am shocked. 'No. I didn't know. I only knew that my legs stank like hell, and that something was itching down there. I can't see for myself what, say, is going on down there,' replies this stoic individual. He describes himself as 'a type who doesn't use analgesics or sleeping pills, and causes doctors a lot of concern, because my eyes say: I am not going to become a vegetable.'

### **A social problem?**

'It's the state's fault, a social problem – he needs care, not treatment. Antibiotics can be taken at home too. We have a great number of people occupying beds in this hospital who should not be. This is simply a very visible phenomenon,' maintains a Biķernieki official, who wishes to remain anonymous. 'Yes, it's a big problem. Where should people go to have their wounds dressed, after they have been discharged from hospital? A lot of health centres are not open on Saturdays or Sundays, however.' It is particularly difficult for those patients who live alone, who have limited means, whose illnesses are chronic, restrict their movements or are not wholly curable. In the case of Jānis Polis, all these factors coincide. Add to that a personality out of the commonplace, whose longing for independence in this situation begins to turn into dependence. Even the doctors have noticed that he keeps a certain distance even from his two sons.

'A very talented, temperamental person, with a huge sense of fairness, positive but also changeable' is the opinion of his former colleague held by Jānis Stradiņš, to whom Jānis Polis brought remantadine powders he had synthesised with his own hands for treating influenza during the shortages of the 1980s. The academic considers the triumphal progress of this medication to have been due to a perfect combination of circumstances – the enthusiasm of the chemist Polis and the specifics of a totalitarian superstate. 'If Polis had invented remantadine in independent Latvia, it would not have "gone nuclear". Epidemiological trials can only be conducted on a large scale. The bureaucrats in Moscow were disposed in his favour, the whole of the Leningrad region was roped in!' Polis's stubbornness, however, has long prevented the chemist, who is wholly loyal to independent Latvia, from agreeing to be 'nostrified' – to submit his degree to be recognised by the new Latvian academic system – although that has entailed financial consequences. 'I said "go hang!" Let those who wrote dissertations on the partisans and collective workers' struggles get nostrified. The chemistry of adamantanes has not changed,' the man in question proudly affirmed to me.

The new era has not brought Jānis Polis any good fortune. 'A social problem' is an epithet that Jānis Stradiņš, too, uses in relation to him. 'Polis has ended up in a tragic situation. The inventor has no protection in the Republic of Latvia.

Neither his relationship with manufacturers nor his patent rights have been put in order. On the other hand, we have few people who would have invented a preparation as effective as Jānis Polis did.'

Just as enthusiastically as he once promoted remantadine, this patriarch of chemists now promotes Vision food supplements. The photographer who accompanied me is given a couple of mixtures that the company's chairman himself handed out to participants at a company meeting in Moscow in August. Jānis Polis, too, had bought tickets for the journey, but was unable to go due to his legs. Nevertheless, the distributors sent a consignment to Latvia. In hospital, his days are full, even though he feels like Neznaika ('Know-Nothing') in Sun City in the Nosov children's story – a simple child in a land of technological marvels. Representatives from *Olainfarm* have so far not made contact with him. 'Ladies, I shall be your Santa Claus' he has promised the nurses in the surgical ward. 'But you must promise to be good!'

He gives me an emotional recital in Russian of verses from *The Book of Lamentations* by the Armenian poet Grigor of Narek, about a solitary monk with putrefying sores. On leaving, I am given a page with Elza Ņezbere's patriotic *Prayer*, written in 1938, the year in which Jānis Polis was born. He read it aloud to the Latvian diaspora poet Andrejs Eglītis at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, and at the end of the 1980s at a Popular Front' meeting at Aglona: 'Latvia! May your name be forever blessed ...'

## Winner AV

**Diana Spinu**

**Report title: "Izmaiņas pensiju sistēmā" ("Pensions")**

**Published in: TV5, 21/01/2010**

Diana Spinu is 28 years old, and graduated with a diploma from the Baltic International Academy "Public relations" department. Her career as a journalist started in the news section of daily newspapers in Russian "Vesti Segodņa" and she later started working in a TV news service.

Diana has been working for five years as a reporter and news program for TV5 "Evening News". The topics that Diana most frequently covers are politics (she works as a parliamentary correspondent) and criminal issues.

### **Summary: "Izmaiņas pensiju sistēmā" ("Pensions")**

This report is not about poverty today, but about poverty tomorrow. Government is developing a plan to save 50 or even 100 million lats.

There are two possible scenarios – to take the money from current pensioners and freeze deposits into the second pension level at 2%, or reduce them to zero. Experts are warning that this step can have serious consequences in the future. After 20-30 years a day can come, when it will be said to pensioners: "We are sorry, this month you will not get any money, because years ago government was mending budget holes on your expense."

In the report, apart from experts and politicians, the journalist wanted to show simple Latvian citizens – a young man and young woman. Do they think about the times, when they will grow old? Do they expect to receive a pension? Will they forgive the country that used their money and played with their destiny? It is easy to cut future pensions, because just a few people understand that will affect their future...

### **The national winners were selected by a national jury which consisted of:**

- Evija Meiere, Ministry of Welfare (NIB)
- Ivars Bušmanis, EC Representation
- Elina Alere-Fogele, Crisis center "Skalbes"
- Marija Mickeviča, Latvian Women organisation cooperation network (NGO)
- Daina Jankaine, National Ambassador, TV journalist, producer

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<sup>i</sup> the organization which led Latvia to its [independence](#) from the [Soviet Union](#)