

Address by Otmar Kloiber
Secretary General of the World Medical Association on occasion of the
25 year Anniversary Celebration of the Czech Medical Chamber
Prague, April 14, 2016.

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Honorable Minister,
President of the Czech Medical Chamber,
Distinguished Guests,

It is my pleasure and honour to convey the congratulations of the World Medical Association to the Czech Medical Chamber. Today you are celebrating 25 years of work representing physicians and safeguarding quality health care for patients.

The 25 years of this chamber's existence are living proof of the democratic development of your country. After the Velvet Revolution, your republic embarked on an open and new society where civil engagement and professional autonomy again found a place. This has not been easy and some of you may feel that it was not always straightforward. From the perspective of an outside observer, I would like to assure you: You have done a formidable job!

You have a long and proud academic medical tradition reflected in the Czech Purkinje Society. You have enriched this by your engagement for placing professional and social responsibility in the hands of your organization and taking the lead in the development of the profession. By founding a chamber, the Czech physicians have taken an active role in developing the framework of a free and democratic country. You have built a community of professionals, taking responsibility not only for your colleagues, but also for those you serve: the patients and people of this country.

We physicians commit ourselves to high professional standards in the enduring traditions of caring, ethics and science. We advocate for our patients and we oppose all those who wilfully or unintentionally hinder the delivery of health care. We stand up for public health and advocate for sound public health policy. All of this we do to protect the health, dignity and self-determination of our patients and the population as a whole.

Professional autonomy is essential in order to achieve this. Independence from undue influence – whoever may try to disturb the doctor-patient relationship – is paramount for us and our patients, who need to be able to trust us implicitly.

Likewise, our institutions, chambers, orders, colleges and associations need this autonomy in order to fulfil their role: To guide and counsel, to supervise and direct, where necessary.

Chambers of physicians, orders and colleges, if they do their job properly, are rarely "everybody's darling". They challenge their own colleagues and their profession, they challenge governments and politicians. That is part of their role. And if everybody likes you then something is probably not right.

Arguing for the independence of the profession is not always fun; it can be utterly difficult, especially when arguing in the political sphere. Voltaire put it this way: "It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong."

Let me finish with a quote from Theodore Roosevelt. His speech, given in April 1910 at the Sorbonne in Paris, was entitled "Citizenship in a Republic". This speech later became known as the "Man-in-the-Arena Speech".

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

You have tried and you have succeeded. Enjoy the triumph of your achievement. We wish you well for the next 25 years.