

Anamnesis

X



INTERNATIONAL
SURGICAL ACADEMY
PROF. NINKOVIC

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Grow with education

Anamnesis

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ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The International Surgical Academy Prof. Ninković (ISAN) was born out of a simple, yet powerful vision: to cultivate knowledge and foster growth within the fields of plastic, reconstructive, esthetic, and hand surgery. With “Grow with Education” as our guiding principle, ISAN is dedicated to creating an environment where surgeons, particularly young professionals, can access world-class training without the need to leave Croatia.

At ISAN, we believe that continuous learning is not merely a choice but an obligation to our patients and profession. Our academy brings together top experts from Croatia and abroad to provide hands-on training, lectures, and mentorship, ensuring that the latest advancements and techniques are accessible to all. The inaugural ISAN Congress, held in Čepin, was a testament to this mission. We gathered esteemed colleagues from across the globe in a setting that encouraged meaningful dialogue, shared experience, and the growth of ideas that will propel our field forward.





word of the chief editor

WHEN “BIG” HANDS JOIN TOGETHER

Dear colleagues, friends and family,

Year after year, medicine records new successes, saving or positively changing more and more lives.

Of course, all innovations must be documented and presented somewhere.

In October, we had the opportunity to listen to and learn from the world’s leading experts in the field of plastic and reconstructive medicine. The magician behind the curtain who made it all possible is Prof. Milomir Ninković.

The congress was held as part of the ISA Surgical Academy at the Materre hotel and the conference hall of the Crna Svinja restaurant.

In addition to excellent lectures and oral presentations, students also helped ensure that everything ran smoothly.

The slogan of the surgical academy is “Grow with education.” The question is: “What does this phrase mean to me?”

Throughout life and studies, education builds the foundation that no one can take away from us, and we grow together with our profession, colleagues, and loved ones. Growth doesn’t only go in the direction of “official literature”; it goes hand in hand with our predecessors and those who come after us. Without the development and expansion of knowledge, there is no progress: knowledge does not stop with the latest edition of a certain medical book or the best lecturer, but must be selflessly passed on in order to promote “curiosity about the unexplored” and “understanding the facts and protocols that have already been established.”

Therefore, I invite you all to take a look at our “file” and read about what happened “anamnestically,” but also to continue writing new “recommendations” together.

Ana Prica
Chief Editor

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PROF. NINKOVIC



CONVERSATIONS

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INTERVIEW WITH ZLATAN IBRADŽIĆ, M.D.

We begin with a simple, yet complex question: why medicine? Can you tell us why you chose to study medicine and when you knew this was what you wanted to do?

I have always viewed medicine as a noble profession where I can serve and help others, truly doing good (yep, the classic irreparable optimist since my high school days!).

How did you feel as an invited lecturer at the surgical academy? Can you briefly tell us what you talked about and what it's like to be part of a new and modern medical story?

Being a lecturer in the company of giants like Professor Ninković, Samir Mardini, Khoury, Zic, Broer, and many others is truly an honor and a privilege for me, as well as a huge boost. Newton would say, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." That is, learning from these same giants and having them as excellent examples of what we all need to be—and, more importantly, can be. Of course, with a lot of hard work and effort.

Considering that you have worked as a doctor in the United Kingdom for the past few years, how does their healthcare system compare to Croatia's? Can you briefly tell us about your work and specialization?

Ah, explaining the NHS (National Health Service) and medical training in the UK would probably take an entire podcast, it's that complicated. In short, they have a public healthcare system similar to the Croatian HZZO. So, all citizens have "free" access to healthcare, funded by the state through contributions from all employed individuals. "Training" or specialization in the UK is divided into several phases and takes around 10 years in total. However, it is not time-bound but competency-based, according to the curriculum prescribed by the respective Royal Colleges (Royal College of Surgeons, Royal College of Medicine, etc.). In the first 4-5 years, a doctor works in a junior capacity, similar to our junior staff. After that, they take a general surgical or medical exam, which is a prerequisite to becoming a "specialist registrar." As a registrar, a doctor continues training for another 5-6 years in a specific field (e.g., only endocrinology, only otolaryngology, or only abdominal surgery). However, at this point, they are given much more freedom and responsibility, and they are expected to manage and operate in 80% of cases independently. After gaining all the necessary competencies during those 5-6 years, they take the FRCS (Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons) exam and become a "consultant" in their field, the alpha and omega. The UK has probably the longest specialist training, but the advantage is that by the end of it, a doctor must have seen and worked in all areas of the specialty and be fully qualified.

Another big advantage is that during over half of their training, "trainees" (specialists in training) have a very high level of autonomy and carry significant responsibility, practically operating on their own, so they are truly ready to manage all aspects of their specialty when they finally become consultants.

What's next in your career? Will you go to other countries or return to Croatia?

I will stay at QVH (Queen Victoria Hospital) until the New Year, and then, in January 2025, I will go to Ireland for 4-5 months to complete an aesthetic fellowship (a specialization program in aesthetic surgery) at Avoca Clinic, the largest private plastic surgery clinic in Ireland. After that, we'll see—there are several offers and paths for further specialization, both in the UK and elsewhere. What I'm already sure of is that I want and need to spend at least 6 months at Ganga Hospital in India and Taiwan. These are places where so many surgeries and micro-surgeries are done that it is incomparable to any other center in the world (they have about 30 operating rooms dedicated solely to plastic surgery!). Of course, I will always keep "watering the flowers" back home, in Croatia, and maintain relationships. Returning is always an option. I usually say, "I'm not a tree, I can move." The world is getting smaller and smaller, and it is much easier to learn from many centers of excellence today, but it is also crucial

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to bring what we've learned back home and enrich our local systems with new knowledge and expertise.

What trends do you see in plastic and reconstructive surgery, and what can we expect in the future?

Well, we truly live in a time of marvelous inventions! Plastic, primarily reconstructive surgery, will gain even more momentum in the coming decades, thanks to other branches of medicine and technology. Micro-surgery has already become the standard worldwide. The next step is super-microsurgery, such as stitching lymphatic vessels and performing anastomoses to treat lymphedema. In addition, plastic surgery will soon adopt robotic systems for complex reconstructive surgeries involving free tissue flaps. Limb and face transplants should become standard procedures, especially with the development of new immunosuppressive drugs. Regenerative medicine and new artificial materials for reconstructing skin and nerves, as well as 3D printing, will greatly help with planning and surgery. My secret hope (which I believe is realistic) is that during my professional lifetime, we'll have technologies and

medicines that we've only seen in Star Wars or Star Trek.

Outside of medicine, what is your favorite way to "escape from the white coat"?

I'll answer this right away—Highlander (hiking)! Especially the Velebit edition. For many years, I've been involved in the organization, and I say that I "traditionally make my annual pilgrimage to Velebit." I love hiking and always say that unfortunately, I don't hike as much as I should or want to. Additionally, I adhere to the belief that "surgeons who play video games operate faster and better," so I spend a little time (just a few hours a week) playing Call of Duty on my computer.

What advice would you give to us, students and young doctors, based on your own experience studying and working in healthcare?

Effort, perseverance, and dedicated work always pay off in the end, no matter how much it may not seem like it right now. Rome wasn't built in a day, but also remember that The Lord of the Rings wouldn't be the legendary story we all know and love if the char-

acters simply flew with the Eagles to Mordor. Embrace your hero's journey and hardship. The greater the dragon you slay, the more epic the story. Make sure you know yourself well, know what you truly want (and what you don't want!). Maintain relationships with colleagues and friends, help each other, and remember that you are running a marathon, no matter what "specialization" you choose. A marathon and Rome take time. Like hiking, the main joy and growth lie in the journey itself (during which you become better), not in reaching the summit (in moments of exhaustion, always remember Nietzsche's "Imagine Sisyphus happy!"). Get to know and ask those who have already walked that path what you should do and how to do it. Always be humble, but also always remember how much you are worth and how much you have already achieved (as I say, maintain an optimal gravitational constant of 9.81 meters per second squared, neither more nor less). And please, never be ashamed to ask for help or ask questions.

May the Force be with you, always!
Yours sincerely,
Zlatan Ibradžić, M.D.



biography

Zlatan Ibradžić was born in Sisak. He completed his medical studies in 2018 in Zagreb, and for the last 5 years, he has been in England specializing in plastic and reconstructive surgery. During his "English journey," he worked at major plastic surgery centers such as Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham (the largest trauma center in the United Kingdom) and St Andrew's Centre, one of the largest burn centers in Europe. He currently works at Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, one of the birthplaces of modern plastic surgery. Ibradžić is dedicated to his education and the education of others. Just like in his student days, he enjoys holding suturing courses for medical students and mentoring younger colleagues. In his free time (which is limited), he enjoys hiking and always makes sure to visit Velebit as the leader of the Highlander Medical Team.

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INTERVIEW WITH ANA-MARIA LAZAR, M.D.

We begin with a simple yet complex question: why medicine? Can you tell us why you chose to study medicine and when you knew this was the path you wanted to take?

It sounds like a cliché, but I've known since I was a child. Unfortunately, I encountered illnesses among my loved ones, and through those experiences, I knew even then that I wanted to help people heal. Surgery was always an option because I am a very "hands-on" person, and I enjoy work that involves manual skills and provides immediate results.

How did you feel in the role of a guest lecturer at the Surgical Academy? Can you briefly tell us what you spoke about and what it's like to be part of a new and modern medical story?

I am extremely honored and proud to have had the opportunity to present our work among the world's leading experts and to show (and confirm) that we can stand side by side with them in terms of expertise. The topic of my lecture was the indivisibility of aesthetic and reconstructive procedures in plastic surgery, highlighting the importance of the aesthetic outcome of surgery and the integration of non-surgical methods as additional options for the patient. Professor Ninković's

Surgical Academy is a commendable project that will surely bring forth many excellent surgeons in the future, because knowledge comes from a great man and expert like the professor. The congress was the first, but the organization was at such a level that it felt like the 101st, and we can expect many more great things in the future.

You've also held numerous educational sessions, and recently you were invited as a speaker by Professor Ninković. What was the primary focus of the education?

Yes, a big part of my work involves education, where I make a great effort to pass on everything I know about a particular topic to my colleagues. I had the opportunity to give a lecture on the application of recombinant enzymes, which are a major innovation and a "game changer" in treating various issues. Professor Ninković and the Piora staff were wonderful hosts, and the theoretical part of the education turned into a pleasant and constructive discussion on the topic.

You recently opened a private practice in the center of Osijek. How is it going so far, and what made you decide to take on this venture? What services do you offer?

Well, we are about to mark the one-year anniversary of "Estetika dr. Lazar" and I can tell you that I am extremely satisfied. Although I was on maternity leave and mostly focused on administrative tasks, I have an excellent team that is helping us move forward. I definitely didn't plan to open a practice during my pregnancy, or at least not before finishing my specialization, but certain (un)fortunate circumstances aligned so that it happened precisely then. It was a logical sequence of events, given the demand. We offer services such as skin quality treatments, addressing various skin and scalp issues, hyaluronic fillers, botulinum toxin, various injectable treatments, and soon we will have several medical devices available. I am also happy that we can offer our patients high-quality products for home care to enhance the outcome of treatments.

What are the trends in maxillofacial and aesthetic surgery, and what can we expect in the future?

When it comes to aesthetics, the trends are moving towards a more natural look and less invasive procedures. Patients want to take care of their appearance but don't want it to be obvious that something has been done. In maxillofacial surgery, the gold standard for reconstruction lies in

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microvascular surgery, which is extremely complex but offers unlimited possibilities for patients.

Outside of the medical realm, what is your favorite way to "escape from the white coat"?

Definitely my family. My husband is also in the medical field, but in our home, we talk the least about medical topics. We love a dynamic lifestyle, so

even the little free time we have, we use for traveling and enjoying life.

What advice would you give to us, students and young doctors, based on your own experience studying and working in healthcare?

Always follow what you love and what interests you, even if that doesn't happen right after graduation. Many

times during your studies and later, working in the system, you will encounter people and situations that want to steer you off course or slow down your progress. See them only as motivation. Medicine itself is not an easy profession, so why then work in something that's not your passion?



biography

I was born on November 2, 1992, in Osijek, where I lived and finished my medical education. In 2007, I enrolled in the Medical School in Osijek, in the dental technician program, but after completing the first year, I realized that I didn't see myself in that profession, so I finished high school as a nurse. In 2011, I enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine in Osijek. During my studies, I was involved in student associations and the Student Council, and in the last two years of my studies, I served as the president of the Student Council. I participated in student exchanges, and after graduating in July 2017, I went on a two-month Erasmus internship in Aachen, in the field of head and neck surgery, where I definitely decided what I wanted to pursue professionally. After completing my internship, I was employed at the Department of Emergency Medicine, where I worked for a year and a half. In August 2019, I started my specialization in maxillofacial surgery as the first female doctor at that department. During my specialization, I attended numerous courses in surgery and aesthetics and became a regional educator for the application of hyaluronic fillers and recombinant enzymes. In October 2023, I opened my own private practice in aesthetic medicine and maxillofacial surgery, and five days later, I became a mother to my son Luka.

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PROF. MILOMIR NINKOVIĆ - INTERVIEW

We begin with a simple yet complex question: why medicine? Can you tell us how you decided to study medicine, and when you knew this was the field you wanted to pursue?

Choosing medicine was not an instantaneous decision, but rather the result of years of development and maturation. Even as a child, I was fascinated by the human body, its complexity, and how it functions. This fascination followed me throughout my education and never faded. However, the decision to specialize in plastic surgery came later, during my medical studies. I realized that I was particularly drawn to the possibility of not only treating patients but also improving their quality of life. Plastic surgery seemed like the perfect combination of art and science, where aesthetic perception merges with precise surgical techniques. The final push to focus on this field came during one of the first surgeries I assisted with. It was a facial reconstruction of a patient who had survived a severe injury. To see how that patient, after a long recovery, returned to their normal life was immensely satisfying and confirmed that I had chosen the right path. Over time, I came to understand that plastic surgery is much more than mere aesthetic correction.

It's an opportunity to help people feel better and more satisfied with themselves, to boost their self-esteem, and to achieve harmony between their inner and outer appearance. It's a vocation that requires not only knowledge and surgical skill, but also a creative component, accompanied by empathy, patience, and an understanding of individual needs.

"Grow with education" is the slogan of your Surgical Academy. Can you explain its meaning in a few sentences in the context of your field and the current advances in medicine in Slavonia, and by extension, Croatia?

I founded the Academy for a very simple reason—to enhance the knowledge of young colleagues without them needing to go abroad. In our center, we provide top-level surgical care and education with the help of the most respected specialists both from within the country and abroad. The slogan 'Grow with education' is our guiding principle, because without daily self-improvement and education, there can be no progress. We believe that continuous learning is not only our choice but also our responsibility to our patients. In this way, we contribute to the development of plastic surgery in Croatia and ensure that our patients have access to the best possible medical care. During my work at the University of Innsbruck and as the head of one of the largest German plastic surgery clinics

in Munich, I mentored 82 specialists and eight professors of plastic surgery who are now leading clinics throughout Germany. This experience motivated me to open the International Surgical Academy Prof. Ninković, which will focus on training specialists in all areas of surgery, with a particular emphasis on plastic, reconstructive, aesthetic, and hand surgery.

As one of the best and most qualified surgeons in plastic and reconstructive medicine, we must ask: after numerous successes, lectures, and recognitions, do you still feel fear before entering the operating room or before giving a lecture at a conference? Which surgery will you remember for the rest of your life?

Fear, in the true sense of the word, would probably not be the correct description. Instead of fear, I feel a deep respect for each patient and each situation. Before every surgery, no matter how many times I've performed it, there is always a sense of tension and full concentration on the problem at hand. It's a positive tension, aimed at predicting everything and ensuring the best possible outcome. It's similar before giving a lecture. The desire to communicate my knowledge and experience as clearly and accurately as possible creates a certain level of nervousness. But that's simply proof that I care about delivering the highest quality in what I do. It's hard to single out just one surgery.

Every surgery carries its own story and presents a new challenge. However, if I had to choose one, it would be the first major reconstructive surgery I performed on my own. That was the moment I realized I was ready to take responsibility for someone else's health and life. I clearly remember every detail of that surgery, from preparation to completion. That success gave me enormous motivation to continue and refine my craft by using my personal creative component to find new solutions based on established principles. Ultimately, the greatest satisfaction comes when I see that I've helped a patient feel better and more satisfied in their own skin and improved their quality of life. That is what motivates me to give my best every day.

What are the current trends in reconstructive surgery, and what can we expect in the future?

The future of reconstructive surgery is extremely promising. Thanks to the rapid development of technology and new scientific insights, we can expect reconstructive procedures to become more efficient, safer, and more personalized. Patients will benefit from less invasive procedures, faster recovery times, and better aesthetic outcomes. It's important to note that these predictions represent only a part of the potential future trends. Technology is constantly evolving, and with it, the possibilities in medicine. However, personal quality and creativity remain key to successful practice.

Before coming to Čepin, you were the head of the Department of Plastic, Reconstructive Surgery, Hand Surgery, and Burn Treatment at the Bogenhausen Hospital in Munich. Can you briefly tell us about your work and successes there?

I became the head of the Department of Plastic and Aesthetic Surgery and Hand Surgery at the Bogenhausen Clinic in Munich in November 2003. I held this position for over two decades. During this time, I gained international recognition and had the honor of being the president of the European Association of Plastic Surgeons (EURAPS), as well as the first German surgeon to have the honor of giving the most prestigious lecture of the British Association of Plastic Surgeons, which was founded in 1962 after the death of Sir Harold Gillies. Later, I also delivered the Skoog Lecture for the Scandinavian Society of Plastic Surgeons. I was, and remain, a passionate mentor and teacher with the goal of passing on my knowledge to young doctors, and I have given numerous lectures and workshops at international congresses. I have also been actively involved in humanitarian projects and supported medical institutions worldwide, especially in our region.

Do you return to your hometown of Sarajevo, both professionally and privately?

Sarajevo is the city that shaped me, and I am part of its history. Although I spent wonderful years in Sarajevo, I currently feel more fulfilled living here. Perhaps the situation will change in the future, but for now, my plans are focused on Osijek. You should never say never, but at this moment I have no concrete plans for a permanent return.

What advice would you give to us, the students and young doctors, based on your own experience in studying and working in healthcare?

Let curiosity drive your learning, not obligation. Medicine is a dynamic field, so strive to continually learn and be open to new knowledge. Try to understand why something works, not just memorize facts. Develop clinical thinking. Try to connect theory with practice. Think about how a certain disease would manifest in real life and how you would approach diagnosis and treatment. Communication with patients is key. Good communication skills are essential for success in medicine. Actively listen to your patients, try to understand their fears and needs, and explain the diagnosis and treatment clearly and simply. Build relationships with colleagues. Collaboration with colleagues is invaluable. Help each other, learn from one another, and create a network of contacts for the future. Take care of your mental health. Medicine is a stressful job. Find activities that help you relax and reduce stress, such as exercise, meditation, or spending time with friends and family. Be patient. Learning medicine takes time, and the path to becoming a successful doctor is long and often difficult. Be patient with yourself and don't give up on your goals. Be open to change. Medicine is constantly evolving, so be prepared to learn new things and adapt throughout your career. Find a mentor! A mentor can provide support, advice, and guidance during your studies and early career. Don't forget about your personal life. Balancing professional and personal life is important for your overall well-being and inner peace.



Finally, what's next for ISA Surgical Academy? What's next for you?

The vision of ISA Surgical Academy is continuous progress in the fields of reconstructive, aesthetic surgery, and hand surgery. In the future, we plan to expand our range of educational programs, including those specialized in specific areas of plastic surgery. We also want to strengthen our international collaboration and become a recognized platform for exchanging knowledge and experience among leading global experts.

We will certainly continue to organize top-level congresses and workshops so that our participants have the opportunity to refine their skills and familiarize themselves with the latest developments in our field. As a professor of plastic surgery, my professional ambitions are focused on further developing my academic career and clinical work. I plan to dedicate more time to scientific research and publish the results of our studies in leading global journals.

I also wish to continue my educational work and mentoring of young colleagues to contribute to the development of future generations of plastic surgeons who will carry on what I've started, improving methods and practices. I believe it's important to constantly improve and keep up with the latest trends in our field to provide our patients with the best possible care.

biography

Prof. Dr. Milomir Ninković, M.D., earned his medical degree, specialized in general surgery, completed a subspecialization in plastic surgery, and obtained a master's degree at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Sarajevo. As a scholarship holder, he had the opportunity to learn microsurgical techniques and the philosophy of reconstruction from Marko Godina in Ljubljana. Professor Ninković aimed to advance Dr. Godina's legacy by expanding the field of reconstructive microsurgery and including new applications related to the transplantation of functional free tissues.

During his subspecialization, Prof. Ninković spent several months at various institutions in the United States. He then joined the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the Medical University of Innsbruck from September 1992 to November 2003. There, he earned his Ph.D. in November 1995 and was appointed Associate Professor in 1997. During his tenure, Prof. Ninković received significant recognition from international plastic surgery associations. In May 1997, he won the first prize for the best project at the European Association of Plastic Surgeons (EURAPS) Congress in Amsterdam, and he was also awarded the Theodor-Billroth Award by the Austrian Surgical Society.

In 1998, Prof. Ninković was awarded the City of Innsbruck Prize for the most successful scientific research at the Leopold-Franzens University in Innsbruck, Austria. That same year, he spent six months at Harvard and received a scholarship from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

This scholarship recognizes young plastic surgeons who significantly contribute to global advancements in plastic and reconstructive surgery through their work and innovations. In 2003, Prof. Ninković received the Marko Godina Scholarship from the American Society for Reconstructive Microsurgery and spent six months visiting leading American universities. In January 2004, he gave the annual lecture at the Microsurgery Reconstruction Congress in Palm Springs.

From November 2003 to December 31, 2023, Prof. Ninković headed one of the largest departments of plastic surgery in Germany, the Department of Plastic, Reconstructive, Hand Surgery, and Burn Treatment at Bogenhausen Hospital, Klinikum München, part of the Technical University of Munich. The department employed 25 doctors and covered the full spectrum of plastic surgery services.



MR.SC. MIROSLAV KALEM - INTERVIEW

We'll start with a simple but complex question: Why medicine? Can you tell us how you decided to study medicine and when you knew this was what you wanted to do?

In high school, I loved biology and technology. At the time, I dreamt that technology would solve biological problems. In my senior year of high school, I saw medicine as the possible answer to those questions. I was fortunate to have chosen that path.

I've always been fascinated by life and its complex mechanisms. In high school, I especially enjoyed biology, but I was also interested in technology and its potential. I dreamed of a day when we could use technology to solve some of the greatest biological puzzles. As I neared the end of high school, it became clear to me that medicine was the only field that could provide a comprehensive understanding of how the human body works and open doors to research in that area. Without hesitation, I decided to pursue this field.

Looking back today, I can say I made the best decision of my life. Medicine has allowed me to deepen my knowledge of the human body and engage in research that fulfills me.

Could you briefly explain the significance of this in the context of your area of work and the current advances in medicine in the region of Slavonia, and by extension, Croatia?

During my studies, I encountered urology as an innovative field. Almost all aspects of diagnosis and therapy in urology rely on technological aids. At that time, urologists were introducing a machine for non-surgical stone fragmentation, ESWL (Extracorporeal Shock Wave Lithotripsy), which was a revolutionary method worldwide. In Osijek, in 1988, I was part of the team that began using this machine. Osijek was the first city in Croatia to have it. This year, I had the opportunity, together with my team, to pioneer the implementation and application of the Da Vinci, Mona Lisa, and Histologu systems in Croatia. All three devices represent the latest technological advancements in world medicine. It doesn't matter where you work, but rather with what and how you work.

Given that you are one of the best and most respected urologists, we have to ask: After numerous successes, lectures, and recognitions, do you still feel nervous before entering the operating room or before giving a lecture at a conference? Which surgery is the one you'll remember for the rest of your life?

I've never felt fear before surgeries. I have always looked forward to working in the operating room. Even today, I approach every surgery, no matter how small, with great respect. I always prepare thoroughly for the procedure, often reviewing the details again before surgery. I always thank the patient for their trust. After 37 years in the surgical field, it's hard to single out a single procedure. However, surgeries on newborns, polytrauma cases, kidney transplants, and

major oncological procedures have always had the most profound impact on me. When it comes to lectures and conferences, I still experience some stage fright, as there is a great responsibility in passing on my knowledge and experiences.

What trends do you see in urology, and what can we expect in the future?

As in all medical specialties, we expect increasing use and application of artificial intelligence and gene therapy in treatment processes.

Before coming to Čepin, you led a private practice and urological surgical department at Lauterbach Hospital. Could you briefly tell us about your work and achievements there?

This has been a great challenge for me. After 31 years of medical career in Germany and Switzerland, 24 of which were spent in leadership positions, I returned to Croatia. I sold my private practice, accepted an invitation from Marko Pipunić, and moved to Čepin. We are receiving many inquiries about the return of Croatian doctors who specialized in Germany, and Priora was designed as a German-style hospital, from the working style to communication culture, and thus patient care. For us, the patient is the most important, not the doctor or the director. That's how I learned it in Germany, and that's what I'm developing with my colleagues in our institution.

Could you tell us about the Mona Lisa system? What are its advantages over “traditional” biopsies?

The Mona Lisa Dx Biobot is revolutionizing prostate biopsies by using fusion biopsy, allowing extremely precise visualization and highly targeted sampling, significantly improving cancer detection.

Traditional prostate biopsy methods often miss cancerous areas due to limited ultrasound imaging and random sampling.

Mona Lisa uses fusion biopsy, which combines pre-biopsy MRI images analyzed by radiologists to mark suspicious cancerous areas. During the biopsy, these images are synchronized with ultrasound images of the prostate in the operating room, enabling the urologist to have extremely precise visualization of the targeted areas.

This precision dramatically reduces the number of repeat biopsies and provides an accurate location of the tumor, which is critical for planning further therapy and treatment outcomes.

Can you tell us about the Da Vinci system? What was the first surgical procedure performed using it?

We were the first in Croatia to introduce the Da Vinci Xi system, and the first surgeries performed were radical prostatectomies.

The Da Vinci system allows for complete cancer removal while preserving the integrity and function of surrounding tissues, primarily the sphincter for maintaining continence and the nerves for preserving potency. This sophisticated system acts as an extension of the surgeon, enabling more dexterity and control during the operation thanks to its unique design and technology.

In addition to prostate surgeries, the Da Vinci robot is used for complex and minimally invasive surgeries for treating kidney disease and other surgical specialties like gynecology and general surgery.

Robotic surgery is not a routine service; it's a high-performance service performed by highly specialized surgeons using cutting-edge technology. Additionally, this type of surgery ensures:

- increased precision: provides surgeons with 3D vision and more precise access to the intervention area, reducing damage to healthy tissues
- faster recovery: patients can recover more quickly and return to normal activities sooner than after traditional surgery
- reduced risk of infection and excessive bleeding
- less pain: thanks to minimally invasive techniques, patients feel less pain
- shorter hospital stays
- smaller visible scars and minimal incisions.

The Histology Scanner is also a world novelty that we've integrated into our cancer treatment protocols. The Histology Scanner detects cancer cells intraoperatively, where every minute counts. From taking the biopsy to the surgical diagnosis, tissue assessment is crucial for an efficient and straightforward approach to cancer treatment. The device performs confocal microscopy for high-resolution imaging of fresh tissue surfaces, allowing the visualization of morphological microstructures. Histological preparations are made without cutting the tissue, and clear images are available immediately, providing crucial support for decision-making during surgery.

It takes a maximum of 8 minutes during the operation to examine the entire prostate and determine whether everything has been removed or if the procedure needs to be extended. For smaller tissues, histological decisions can be made in even less time.

What advice would you give to us, students and young doctors, based on your own experience of studying and working in healthcare?

I advise everyone to work in other clinics and countries. Through these experiences and comparisons with other educational and healthcare systems, you'll see that the same problems can be solved in various ways. If you apply this to your everyday learning and patient care, you won't have fear of the profession. You will gain great respect for patients and be able to solve many problems with minimal stress. For your generation, it's much easier because you already belong to the European and international generation.

Finally, what's next for IMC Piora? What's next for you?

I really don't know yet. I haven't started preparing for so-called active retirement. I hope my health will serve me well, and perhaps I will focus on educating young colleagues and writing more academic papers.

biography



Tomislav Kalem is a Croatian-German citizen born in 1962 in Dobož, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has had a truly impressive professional medical journey. His rich career reflects deeply rooted expertise and a thorough dedication to the field of urology.

Mr. Sc. Tomislav Kalem, M.D., graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Zagreb. He completed his medical studies in Osijek in 1987 and obtained his master's degree in 1994 from the same university.

After completing his studies, he focused on specializing in urology, beginning his specialization in Osijek in 1991 and successfully finishing it in Frankfurt in 1998. During his professional development, he completed specialist training at renowned medical institutions in Bern, Berlin, Karlsruhe, and Fulda, gaining significant experience in the field of urology.

After passing the specialist exam, he took on the role of department head at the Clinic for Urology and Pediatric Urology in Fulda. He further advanced his career, becoming the deputy head of the same clinic, a position he held until 2005. Since 2005, Tomislav Kalem has been running his own private practice and served as the head of the private department at Lauterbach Hospital, consistently providing the highest quality of medical care to his patients. He held this position until the end of 2023, after which he was appointed director of the International Medical Center Priora.







INTERVIEW WITH PAULA SKALA

International Medical Center PRIORA

To begin with, can you tell us a little about yourself?

Of course! At the start of my career, I didn't expect to find myself in such an extraordinary environment. It's a great fortune when, from an early age, you know the direction you want to take in life. My family has always been oriented towards international education, from kindergarten to university, while I was drawn to biology and chemistry, with a particular interest in molecular biology in medicine. I found the ideal combination of this at the Biomedical Sciences program in the Netherlands. Although the program is primarily academic, I knew from the beginning that I wanted to work in a hospital. After university, I had to seek opportunities that matched my ambitions, but when I heard about the International Medical Center Piora, I knew it was the perfect opportunity to combine all my interests.

You completed your studies in Biomedical Sciences at Maastricht University. What is your specific area of interest? What are the opportunities in the professional field in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe?

Biomedical studies is a relatively new scientific field, a combination of medicine and basic sciences. This brings about the paradox of broad versus narrow specialization. In Northern and Central Europe, there is a well-developed infrastructure and opportunities for young scientists in the biomedical sciences.

It is common to continue professional development in hospitals and institutes after graduation. There, the focus is not on a "finished product" but on investing time and resources into shaping young professionals.

Besides IMC Piora, have you completed any professional training elsewhere in Europe? Where did your professional career begin?

The Master's program at Maastricht University allows for specialization, and I chose pathophysiology and inflammatory processes. After a year of theoretical work, I did my practical training at the Max Perutz Institute in Vienna, within the Vienna Biocenter, where I worked with Thomas Decker, a specialist in immunology, and wrote my thesis based on my own research. Working in basic biology further strengthened my desire to pursue scientific work in a hospital setting, which eventually led me to a position at IMC Piora.

Can you briefly tell us about the preparation and organization process of the congress?

This congress represents the first international project of my career. Earlier this year, I collaborated with Professor Ninković on the "Ninković Method" digitalization project. This is how we "entered" the congress topic, and we only "exited" it on October 26th, with the successful completion of the ISAN inaugural congress. These five months of preparation were an intense learning process about organization, logistics, and finances;

from sponsors and contract writing to audiovisual technology, it was a huge challenge. I am fortunate to work with experienced professionals from whom I have learned a lot.

Do you have any advice for students and young professionals in the field of biomedicine?

Over the past few years, I've developed a deep respect for the unpredictability of the path we're on. We often view education and careers as a linear processes. In university, everything seems clear and predictable, but out in the real world, chaos reigns, and it's important to be able to recognize opportunities when they arise. Ten years of education can be just as valuable as an hour-long coffee with someone who inspires you and takes you in a new direction. Sometimes, you need to leave your set plan behind and open yourself up to unforeseen encounters and experiences that can lead you down an entirely new path.

Finally, what is next for IMC Piora? What's next for you?

I'm really looking forward to upcoming projects. IMC Piora recently signed a contract with the Faculty of Medicine in Osijek to become a teaching base, and Professor Kibel and I are working on establishing a scientific unit, which I will coordinate, and later, I hope, pursue a PhD. We plan to introduce the latest clinical research, focusing on cardiology and urology, while establishing collaborations with European companies. We also plan to form a team for organizing congresses within the International Surgical Academy Prof. Ninković. A very exciting year lies ahead!

biography

I hold both a BSc and MSc in Biomedical Sciences from Maastricht University (UM), with a specialization in pathophysiology and inflammation. During my studies, I had the opportunity to undertake an exciting research internship in Vienna, AT at Max Perutz Labs as a part of Thomas Decker's research group. During my time there, I gained valuable insights that have been instrumental in shaping my future. Since May, I have been the lead organizer of the upcoming medical congress focusing on plastic, reconstructive, and aesthetic surgery, set to debut in October 2024. Additionally, IMC Priora aims to establish itself as a premier medical research center, driving innovation and pioneering research through clinical trials. Under the leadership of Prof. Alexandar Kibel, MD, PhD, I will serve as the Scientific Unit Coordinator, guiding the research unit from concept to execution.



Anamnesis

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INTERNATIONAL
SURGICAL ACADEMY
PROF. NINKOVIC



**STUDENT
IMPRESSIONS**

student impressions

Tamara Stanojlović

“...The magic of plastic surgery lies in its ability to combine art and science...”

It was an extraordinary honor for me to attend the Congress of Plastic, Reconstructive, Aesthetic, and Hand Surgery, organized by Professor Milomir Ninković, from October 24th to 26th, 2024.

First and foremost, I am very pleased that this congress was held at the newly opened International Medical Center PRIORA in the village of Čepin, near Osijek. The gathering of top-tier doctors significantly elevated the reputation of medicine in the eastern part of Croatia.

During this congress, I had the opportunity to listen to the experiences of leading global experts in this field of medicine, learn about the latest advancements and research, and expand my own knowledge. While many people view plastic surgery as primarily aesthetic, this congress demonstrated that it is far from purely aesthetic. Plastic surgery is an incredibly demanding field, where doctors are tasked with giving their all to ultimately see a satisfied and happy patient, restoring their quality of life to the level it was at before.

Listening to numerous experts from Europe, America, and Asia, I realized the beauty and quality of this profession, which is selflessness. The magic of plastic surgery lies in its ability to combine art and science, creating opportunities for transformation and enhancing patients' quality of life. It is not merely a tool for aesthetic changes, but a way to restore confidence, functionality, and identity, especially for those who have endured severe trauma or illness. Each intervention presents a unique challenge requiring precision, empathy, and creativity – from subtle adjustments to complex reconstructive procedures.

I also enjoyed seeing how doctors, even after many years of practice, continue to invest in their education, remain open to learning something new, and appreciate their colleagues with whom they maintain contact, even on the other side of the world. Thanks to events like this and doctors like Professor Ninković, students and young doctors are motivated to invest in their knowledge and skills, and medicine finds its true meaning.

I am also grateful and proud to be part of OSCON, a small family of dedicated medical students who, in collaboration with Professor Ninković and other organizers, contributed with their hard work and dedication to the success of the congress. Together, we were the right hand of the organizers throughout the event. I am glad that Professor Ninković recognized our commitment, accepted our ideas, and entrusted us with the creation of the abstract booklet. This responsibility is not only a sign of his trust in our work, but also an acknowledgment of our developing expertise, motivating us to give our best. This experience has not only prepared us for future professional challenges but has also shown us that progress in medicine is only visible through lifelong education and the selfless sharing of knowledge.



student impressions

Ivan Sladoja

“...His lecture left no participant indifferent...”

From October 24th to 26th, I had the privilege of attending the first congress on plastic, reconstructive, aesthetic, and hand surgery organized by the International Surgical Academy Prof. Ninković, held in Čepin. First and foremost, I would like to praise the excellent organization of the event, which was made possible by Prof. Ninković's collaborators and our faculty colleagues who participated in the preparation and volunteered during the event.

The congress began with an opening ceremony, a tour of the IMC Piora, and a very pleasant reception at Hotel Materra. The following two days were packed with lectures from world-renowned experts in the field of plastic surgery, covering a variety of topics: general plastic surgery, head and neck surgery, breast surgery, aesthetic and regenerative surgery, upper extremity and hand surgery, as well as lower extremity reconstruction.

Each topic was presented through numerous case studies, practical experiences, and a wealth of innovative and new techniques. The speakers approached their task with great enthusiasm, eager to share their knowledge with younger doctors, and their lectures were both educational and inspiring. However, what particularly stood out to me were the presentations on reconstructive surgery — facial, forearm, hand, and lower extremity reconstruction. These cases showcased how, through the expertise of surgeons, even after complex trauma, both the functional and aesthetic aspects of the injured body part could be preserved. The lasting relationship between the surgeon and the patient, as well as the gratitude of patients who, after surgery, return to their usual activities, was truly moving — something that would not have been possible without the intervention of skilled surgeons.

One such patient of Prof. Ninković and his team is Theo Kelz, who underwent a bilateral hand transplant in Innsbruck 24 years ago. This was the second such operation in the world. In an emotional lecture, he shared his experiences after the surgery that changed his life,

recounting the 5000 hours of rehabilitation that helped him regain almost full functionality of the transplanted hands.

His lecture left no participant indifferent, and the enthralled audience gave Mr. Kelz and Prof. Ninković a standing ovation.

In conclusion, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to listen to lectures by world-class experts from all over the globe, eager to share their knowledge, experience, and surgical techniques. Furthermore, I am happy that such an event of this caliber is being held in Croatia, particularly in Slavonia, placing it alongside the most developed countries in the world in terms of medical education quality. Finally, I hope that this is just the first of many congresses to be held under the ISA Ninković banner, and that upcoming events will inspire many doctors and students to pursue further education and assist others, just as this one has inspired me.



student impressions

Anamarija Živković

“...one never stops learning in life, and education is the key to progress and growth.”

The ISA (International Society of Aesthetic Surgery) Congress, held in Čepin, was a significant event for the fields of plastic, reconstructive, and aesthetic surgery. Top experts and surgeons from around the world gathered at the initiative of Prof. Dr. Milomir Ninković, one of the most recognized names in the world of reconstructive surgery, whose dedication to his work and vision made this event possible.

The congress held in Čepin is proof that science and top-level experts know no boundaries. This small village in Slavonia became a temporary hub for global medical professionals, a rare opportunity that few places can boast. The congress served as a platform where different experiences and visions came together, all aimed at advancing plastic surgery and exchanging the latest insights.

The event was organized at a high level of professionalism, designed to ensure that guests felt welcome. It took place in the conference hall of the Materra hotel, where, over the course of three days, leading medical experts shared their experiences and knowledge. The program was divided into various sections, including general plastic surgery, head and neck surgery, breast surgery, upper extremities and hand surgery, lower extremities, and aesthetic and regenerative surgery. We had the opportunity to meet doctors from different parts of the world, including Dražan Erić from Qatar, Roger K. Khoury and Suzana Khouri from the USA, Efterpij Demiri from Greece, and many others who participated. The lectures were enriched with examples and practical experiences that sparked questions and excitement among colleagues.

One of the most impressive moments was Prof. Dr. Milomir Ninković's speech. His experience and expertise left a strong impression on all attendees. Known for his innovations and advanced methods in reconstructive surgery, he shared his knowledge and techniques with his colleagues. Another memorable moment was the speech by Teo Kelz, to whom Ninković performed a double hand transplant 24 years ago.

The motivation behind the congress was to acquire new knowledge and experiences, and all attendees were driven by the message “Grow with education,” as one never stops learning in life, and education is the key to progress and growth.



Anamnesis

X



INTERNATIONAL
SURGICAL ACADEMY
PROF. NINKOVIC

**ISAN KROZ
OBJEKTIV**











ANAMNESIS AND PHYSICAL EXAM

GENERAL DATA: Name, surname, year of birth, place of birth, address, occupation, marital status, children.

REASON FOR VISIT: Leading symptoms, emergency admission or routine examination, treatment, etc.

FAMILY HISTORY: Chronic diseases, cancers, mental illnesses, hereditary diseases, cause of death and year of death, etc.

PERSONAL HISTORY: Previous illnesses and surgeries, current illness.

FUNCTIONS AND HABITS: Urination (frequency, color, nocturia, disturbances); Stool (amount, frequency, presence of blood, color changes, etc.); SMOKING, ALCOHOL, DRUGS; WOMEN (menarche, menstrual cycle, pregnancies, miscarriages).

ALLERGIES AND MEDICATIONS: Existing allergies and medications currently used in chronic therapy.

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL HISTORY: Travel to tropical regions, contact with animals or infectious patients, outdoor exposure, etc.

WORK AND SOCIAL HISTORY: Type and form of work, financial and housing situation.

The patient is conscious and in good contact. Eupneic, eucardiac, afebrile.

The skin and mucous membranes are well perfused, without rash or signs of hemorrhagic diathesis.

The head is externally normal, with normal configuration, and no signs of trauma. Palpation of the trigeminal nerve exit points is painless.

Pupils are isocoric, with normal reaction to light stimuli. The conjunctiva is well perfused.

The eyeballs are mobile in all directions, no nystagmus present.

The oral cavity has normal perfusion, the pharynx is pink, tonsils within the palatal arches, uvula without edema.

The tragus is painless on palpation, with no visible secretion.

The neck has normal mobility, without lymphadenopathy. The thyroid is not palpable. No signs of meningeal irritation.

The chest is well-shaped, with normal respiratory rhythm.

Normal breath sounds. Percussion note is resonant.

Heart rhythm is regular, sounds are clear, no murmurs.

The abdomen is soft, non-tender, without peritoneal signs. No organomegaly or pathological resistance palpated.

Lumbar succussion test is painless bilaterally.

The extremities are symmetrical, with a non-tender, pitting edema, and normal peripheral pulses. Negative Homan's sign.

