William Ganz

William Ganz is best known for his work with Jeremy Swan in developing the Swan-Ganz catheter. He was born on January 7, 1919 in Kosice, Slovakia. In 1938 he entered the Charles University School of Medicine in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, the school was closed after two years by the Nazi occupation and being Jewish he was sent to a Nazi labour camp in Hungary during WW II. He managed to escape from being sent to the notorious Auschwitz camp in 1944 and went into hiding. After the war ended he went back to the Charles school and graduated in 1947.

He worked in Czechoslovakia for nearly 20 years (under a Communist regime) and found the work oppressing. Under the pretence of taking a holiday he was given permission to take his wife and two sons to Italy in 1966. Instead, they went to Vienna and applied for a visa to the U.S.A. Since he had relatives in Los Angeles this was relatively easy.

On immigrating to America he gained a position at Cedar-Sinai Medical Centre. He was to spend the rest of his career there.

It was here that he came in contact with Jeremy Swan and both of them worked on and developed the Swan-Ganz catheter that revolutionised cardiac care. In 1970 they developed the idea of placing an inflatable balloon at the tip of a more flexible catheter.

Ganz said he had got the idea by watching sailboats.

He also played a great role in the use of thrombolytic agents in the treatment of myocardial infarctions. At first he experimented on animal models and then, in 1982, he and Prediman Shah conducted the first trials in humans. Thrombolysis is, of course, a household form of therapy today.

In 1992 he was awarded the Distinguished Scientist Award of the American College of Cardiology.

He died on November 11, 2009. His death had been preceded by his wife’s in 2005.

On his death, Dr. Prediman Shah said, “He changed the life of millions through his significant contributions to medicine, but he never lost sight of the importance of family and friends. He has left us a rich and enviable legacy.

Contributed by
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