

## Top medicine

2009-11-30

„Facial transplants are extremely complicated and largely involve micro-surgery. In one case we transplanted 80% of a female patient's face. There are few places in the human body with as many blood vessels as the face has“, Professor Maria Siemionow, who performed the operation, internationally acclaimed as the biggest achievement in modern-day surgery, tells Polish Market's Jerzy Bojanowicz. Professor Siemionow is the winner of Polish Market's Honorary Pearl 2009 in the science category.

Maria Siemionow, MD, PhD, graduated from the orthopedic faculty at Poznań Medical Academy in 1974. After emigrating to the U. S. she received a scholarship at the Christine Kleinert Institute in Louisville, Kentucky (1985), where she specialised in hand surgery. Since 1995 Maria Siemionow has headed the plastic- and microsurgery department at the Cleveland Clinic, where in 2005 she received a surgery professorship.

Last December Maria Siemionow successfully transplanted about 80% of the face of a woman who had been shot at by her husband in the world's fourth and America's first such operation. The donor was a deceased woman. Preparations for the 22-hour operation in which a team of eight doctors transplanted bones, muscle tissue, blood vessels and nerves took more than twenty years.

„Facial transplants are very complicated and largely involve microsurgery. But I had worked in the field for many years during my time as a hand surgeon. This woman received 535 cm<sup>2</sup> of new skin, or about 80% percent of her face. There are really hardly any places on the human body as full of blood vessels. In fact I had been preparing myself for this operation for years, but the preparations really picked up when in 2004 the Ethical Treatment Committee granted my team the world's first permission to perform such a transplant. We experimented on human bodies in an anatomy lab, as well as on rats“, Siemionow recounts.

In a televised address to the Pearls of the Polish Economy and Honorary Pearls gala Professor Maria Siemionow stressed that she felt proud to have found herself among Poland's most eminent scientists, economists, enterprisers and artists. "I am

especially grateful to Professor Michał Drews, head of the surgery, gastroenterology and endocrinology department and clinic at Poznań Medical Academy for agreeing to collect this prestigious award on my behalf. I regret that I am unable to do this personally but I'm glad Professor Drews is representing me as we have been closely affiliated for years", Maria Siemionow said.

Thanks to Maria Siemionow, who is a professor-extraordinary at the Poznań Medical Academy, more than 20 young Polish doctors received Cleveland Clinic scholarships. Subsequently several of them received Ph.Ds from professor Siemionow herself.