

A tribute to Dr Mateusz Zygmunt Zatoński

Dr Mateusz Zygmunt Zatoński, who died in January 2022 at the age of 34, was a young, vibrant and talented public health scholar, who, in his short career, had already made a notable impact in the field of tobacco control and public health.

Born in Nadarzyn, Poland in 1987, the fifth and youngest son of Professor Witold and Mrs Jadwiga Zatoński, Mateusz's first passion was history and languages. His interest in the subject led him far from his native Poland, first to study linguistics at Oxford, followed by graduating with a first-class MA (Hons) degree in history and politics at the University of Glasgow, as part of which he completed an exchange programme at the University of California at Berkeley, all of which he attended with his future wife, Dr Aleksandra Herbec. From Scotland, he headed south to London where he completed an MA with distinction in Central and South-East European Studies from University College London.

Over the course of his studies, his focus broadened from history and politics to public health, inspired by his father's work as an eminent cancer epidemiologist and tobacco control expert. Following his MA, he joined the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHMT), where he took an MSc in public health followed by a PhD in public health policy and history.

Mateusz's academic career brought many accolades and prizes. As a student in Glasgow, he won the James Kellas Prize for the best joint honours student in politics, while, in 2018, the Society for the Social History of Medicine awarded him the Roy Porter Student Essay Prize for the best original essay in the social history of medicine. Commenting on Mateusz's MA thesis, the American professor and historian John Connelly wrote that it was 'informative, absorbing, to the point, and full of measured insight – just what I was looking for. [and noted about Mateusz] whether you turn your attention to alcohol or 1920s elections or international relations, my sense is that you have the rather rare ability to produce lucid, absorbing, valuable academic prose.'

In 2019, Mateusz was awarded a European Union Young Forum Gastein (YFG) scholarship, awarded to young European health professionals to participate in the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). He went on to become a YFG Task Force member for EHFG, developing and strengthening the YFG network, and subsequently was a member of the EHFG advisory committee.

While studying for his PhD, his excellence in research led to visiting fellowships and scholarships at institutions including Harvard and the University of California in San Francisco. He then joined the University of Bath in 2019, becoming a research fellow with the Tobacco Control Research Group (TCRG), and through them contributing research to the global tobacco industry watchdog, STOP. Mateusz led the team devoted to researching tobacco industry influence on policy at global and national level and developing ways to address this. He also had roles as Vice President of the Health Promotion Foundation in Warsaw, representing the Foundation at conferences worldwide, and as assistant editor of the Journal of Health Inequalities through his role at the President Stanisław Wojciechowski State University of Applied Sciences, Kalisz, Poland.

Mateusz was a prolific writer: as well as writing and contributing to over 60 academic papers and articles, he produced numerous blogs, conference presentations and book chapters. An associate fellow of the Higher Education Academy, he was an inspiring teacher, always keen to support other early career researchers and supervising several postgraduate students. He presented his research at conferences and events around the world, applying his talent for languages which included Czech, English, French, Italian and Russian in addition to his native Polish.

Mateusz's multi-faceted interests were reflected in his work beyond academic research, which encompassed journal editing, translation, political research and communications. He excelled in bringing together and supporting networks of like-minded people, particularly those connected by Eastern European social and political history. He was a board member for the Platform Ukraine multidisciplinary network; a co-founder and social media officer for *Crossing the Baltic* online magazine; managing editor for the academic journal *Slovo*; and an editor with the Museum for the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

Those who worked with him have described him as 'an exceptional colleague' and 'a role-model', who did 'meaningful research [that will] improve the lives of many people'. His PhD supervisor, Professor Martin McKee of LSHTM, described his death as 'a huge loss for tobacco control and for public health more generally'. TCRG Director Professor Anna Gilmore remembers him as 'an amazing diplomat – able to negotiate complex and divisive issues with intelligence, charm and humour', and 'not only a truly brilliant researcher, but above all a wonderful human being.'

While Mateusz's CV and publication list attest to his numerous academic achievements, those who worked with him remember first and foremost an immensely kind, generous, engaging and passionate friend. Martin McKee noted that 'his smile lit up any room he entered and, since his death, so many people have recalled his many acts of kindness. He was once of the nicest people I have ever had the good fortune to know.'

His colleagues recall 'a sweet spirit' who was 'a dream to work with and an absolute gem of a person. Unwaveringly positive, calm, constructive, kind, thoughtful and fun.' They remember 'his genuine kindness and willingness to help out', and as someone who 'always had time for a word or a joke in the office', was 'full of energy and positivity', and who had an 'unwavering instinct to include others and treat all equally'. Above all, Mateusz was someone whose 'zest for life and living it fully was so apparent'; 'an extraordinary person, tremendous colleague, and dear friend'. He bore his illness with his amazing strength and grace, continuing to work and live life to the full for as long as he was able.

You are invited to read and share more tributes and memories of Mateusz on this [kudoboard created by his family](#).

Mateusz was posthumously awarded a [2022 World No Tobacco Day medal by the World Health Organization](#), in recognition of his contribution to tobacco control efforts regionally and globally.

Mateusz Zygmunt Zatoński, born 02/10/1987, died 17/01/2022 after suffering a rare form of cancer. Survived by his beloved wife and partner of 16 years Dr Aleksandra (Ola) Herbec, his parents Professor Witold and Mrs Jadwiga Zatoński, and his four older brothers, Paweł, Witek, Marcin and Mario.