



OBESITY
is a **DISEASE**

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PRESS RELEASE

Ombudswoman of People with Obesity Disease has become the first Polish honoree awarded with the LIVE ON. GIVE ON. international award for patients.

Magdalena Gajda, the Volunteer Ombudswoman of People with Obesity Disease and Founder and President of the OD-WAGA Foundation for People with Obesity Disease has become the first Polish honoree with the international award LIVE ON. GIVE ON. The Bakken Invitation Award recognizes patients who, with the help of medical technology, have overcome health challenges, and use their “extra life” to give back through volunteerism and community service.

TECHNOLOGY FOR HEALTH

The LIVE ON. GIVE ON. award has been established by Earl Bakken, American engineer, businessman and philanthropist. In 1957 he delivered the first external battery-powered transistorized pacemaker. The pacemakers at the time were large devices that required their own carts and relied on wall current for power. The Bakken pacemaker was light, handy and easy to use, and what was most important – patients were safe in case of power outage.

Earl Bakken is also a founder of Medtronic, which he formed in Minnesota (USA) together with his brother-in-law, Palmer Hermundslie. Today it is a large international medical device company developing devices for patients with health conditions including metabolic disorders (e.g. insulin pumps for patients with type 1 diabetes), cardiac disorders (e.g. pacemakers) and neurological disorders and diseases (e.g. stimulators for persons with Parkinson’s disease) as well as devices for bariatric treatment of obesity (bariatric surgery).

In 1989 Earl Bakken retired and moved to his residence in North Kona Coast, the Big Island of Hawaii. In 2013, the Medtronic Foundation started the Bakken Invitation Program which aims and recognition of patients who, with the help of medical technology, have overcome their own health challenges, earned their “extra lives” and now give back through volunteerism and community service.

FIRST TIME FOR POLAND

Magdalena Gajda is the first Polish honoree of the Earl Bakken’s award (2017 edition). Gajda is the Founder and President of the OD-WAGA Foundation for People with Obesity Disease. At request of the Polish Association for the Study of Obesity she also acts as the Volunteer Ombudswoman of People with Obesity Disease and represents Poland at the Patient Council of the European Association for the Study of Obesity. Privately, Gajda is a journalist who specializes in health and social issues, she is also a PR and CSR expert and an author of about 3,000 publications. The Chief Labor Inspector awarded her for her educational work aiming at including

people with disabilities into the labour market. For 15 years she has been cooperating with Polish NGOs acting for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Gajda has been suffering herself from obesity since childhood. In 2010, after many failed attempts of conservative (nonsurgical) treatment, with the weigh of 136 kilograms, she underwent a bariatric surgery (gastric by-pass). At present she weighs 78 kilograms.

In 2013, invited by experts from the Polish Association for the Study of Obesity, Gajda and the experts held a presentation for the Health Committee of the Polish Senate drawing the public attention to acts of discrimination and stigmatization of people with obesity in Poland. Several months later there was her story published where she told in public about her tragic memories of being treated inhumanely due to her obesity. In 2014, she used her own financial means to found the **OD-WAGA Foundation for People with Obesity Disease**.

THE GOAL IS TO DEVELOP A SYSTEM FOR TREATING OBESITY

The OD-WAGA Foundation is an expert and patient organization. The expert support is provided by obesitologists (experts in obesity treatment) of the Polish Association for the Study of Obesity as well as bariatric surgeons of the Association of Polish Surgeons.

“Nearly 30% of the Poles suffer from obesity disease. It makes several millions of people. It is impossible to help all patients individually. This is why I decided to use my knowledge, experience and professional skills to develop in Poland such a system for treating obesity that all patients would profit from. This is why the OD-WAGA Foundation was founded” says Magdalena Gajda.

The OD-WAGA Foundation aims the Polish law to be adapted for the needs of people with obesity. One of the results of the Foundation actions is that the Polish Commissioner of the Patients’ Rights monitors health facilities in terms of diagnostic equipment necessary to treat and care for patients with third-degree obesity (morbid obesity). In 2016, the OD-WAGA Foundation and its experts led to separating the bariatric surgery from the general surgery and in defining clear rules for refunding bariatric surgery procedures for more than 500,000 patients with morbid obesity.

The OD-WAGA Foundation runs also educational campaigns: what is obesity disease?, how to treat it with modern, safe methods? The Foundation offers also the first in Poland antidiscrimination workshops (on preventing discrimination and stigmatization of people with obesity disease).

EARN YOUR NEW LIFE AND GIVE ON

The Bakken Invitation Award ceremony was held 13 January 2018 at the Big Island in Hawaii (USA) and accompanied by a four-days workshop program for volunteers and NGOs leaders. The workshops were run by an international group of experts and covered such issues as health systems, co-operation with public institutions and leaders responsible for the public health policy, social media as a tool for educational purposes, communication tools useful for those who volunteer and work in watchdog organizations for particular social groups.

“When I was 13 y.o. my schoolmates threw stones at me. They shouted that they did it because I was fat. Now I am 46 y.o. but I remember every single stone which hurt my back, stomach and head. All my life people were laughing at me that I was fat and called me a pig only because I had more adipose tissue on my body than other people. My goal is simple. I would like obesity was professionally treated as other diseases are, and people with obesity were treated with the same dignity as other people” said Magdalena Gajda during the Award ceremony.

Apart from Magda Gajda, 2017 Bakken Invitation Award honorees are:
(in the picture, from the left)

Hui Li – China; **Lindsay Davis** – USA; **Jason Baker** – USA; **Clarissa Solari** – Uruguay; **Mridula Kapil Bhargava** – India; **Ismael Encinas** – Mexico; **Claire Cahill** – Ireland; **Nathália Noschese** – Brasil; (in the lower line) **Karla Altmayer** – USA; **Lewis Hine** – UK; **Magdalena Gajda** – Poland; **Austin Pinkerton** – South Africa (not in the picture)

Read more about the honorees here: <http://www.medtronic.com/us-en/about/foundation/bakken-invitation/2017-honorees.html>

If you would like to receive more information on the OD-WAGA Foundation for People with Obesity Disease, please visit: www.od-waga.org.pl or contact Agata Lantner, International Relations Coordinator at agata.lantner@od-waga.org.pl