



## Obituaries

# Dan Enachescu

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Academic and health minister who transformed Romanian health care after communism

Life in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s was not easy. Other Eastern bloc countries struggled to maintain basic living standards by borrowing from the West, but President Nicolae Ceausescu implemented policies that created the lowest living standards in Europe. Food and fuel were rationed, and most modern drugs were unobtainable. Access to health care depended on nepotism or bribes, and the government spent what money it had on grandiose building projects, notoriously demolishing 7000 houses to construct a palace.

Medical science was influenced by Ceausescu's wife, Elena, who played a key role in the ban on birth control and legal abortions. One consequence was the highest maternal mortality in Europe. Another was the abandonment of thousands of babies to state run "orphanages" by their impoverished parents. The infection of many of these babies with HIV was a consequence of her encouragement of "microtransfusions" to treat infant malnutrition and denial that there was AIDS in Romania. The isolation of the regime extended into all aspects of life; the authorities refused to import or translate most Western texts and persecuted those who dared pursue links with the West.

## Windows to the West

Yet a few academics kept small windows open to Western scientific developments. One was Dan Enachescu, who has died aged 78. As dean of the Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy from 1981 to 1988, he trod a tightrope, doing just enough to keep the regime happy while finding copies of texts such as *Gray's Anatomy* and journals such as the *BMJ* and the *Lancet* for his students. Although the university had to teach "state socialism," "Romania's modern history," and "sanitary (health) economics as a political science," Enachescu strove to ensure that teaching did not simply regurgitate dogma but introduced foreign concepts.

Teaching had been dominated by didactic lectures and assessment by oral examinations, which allowed the examiners complete discretion as to who would pass, a decision as likely to reflect political views and influence as much as students' knowledge. Enachescu introduced practical training in epidemiology and biostatistics, and multiple choice exams. Long before it was common in many Western countries, he cemented links between epidemiology and clinical disciplines so that many final dissertations included a social medicine perspective.

Throughout the communist period, Enachescu tried to introduce the concepts of modern management into medical training. This task was almost impossible, given the capricious nature of the regime, but he seized every opportunity. When an earthquake rocked Romania in 1977, few doctors had any training in emergency planning. The resulting course, subsequently integrated into the undergraduate medical curriculum, contained much that was relevant to making the healthcare system work in less exceptional circumstances.

## A new generation

The revolution in 1989 changed everything. Enachescu became Romania's first post-communist minister of health, starting a programme to create a new generation of health professionals who could support the reform that was needed so badly. He created an Institute for Health Services and Management, which he led after stepping down as minister. He obtained funding from the European Union and the World Bank for an ambitious training programme, involving many of the leading universities in Europe and North America. At first, many students trained abroad, but as soon as the first cohort completed their studies Enachescu established a masters course in Bucharest, with a curriculum based on the most progressive international experiences.

Enachescu saw the importance of strong professional associations and in 1991 cofounded the Romanian Public Health and Health Management Association, a vehicle for continuing professional development that was ahead of its time in eastern Europe. A strong supporter of international collaboration, he ensured that his organisations played a full part in the relevant European associations.

He was a quiet and gentle man but had a clear vision of what was needed and a steely determination to get things done. He was an inspiration to a generation of young Romanian doctors and took great pride in the achievements of his former students.

Enachescu graduated in medicine in 1954 and spent his early years working in rural areas. In 1959 he moved back to Bucharest to pursue a career in public health. He received his doctor of philosophy degree from the Medical University of Bucharest in 1968 and, taking advantage of a brief thaw in Romania's relationship with the West, undertook postgraduate study at the Free University of Brussels. After three years as minister of health, when he struggled, with only partial success, to implement much needed reforms, he returned to academia, as professor of social medicine. His academic career was again interrupted when he spent five years, between 1975 and 1980, as Romanian ambassador to Switzerland, returning as dean of the medical university.

He published almost 200 scientific papers, in the Romanian and international literature, and although a modest person his achievements were recognised with many honours.

He retired formally in 2001. He leaves his wife, Liliana Clara Enachescu. They had no children.

## Notes

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## Footnotes

- Dan Enachescu, former minister of health and university dean, (b Bucharest, Romania 1930; q

Bucharest 1954; MD PhD), died from cancer on 24 November 2008.