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The Beginnings of Medical Education at the University of Vilnius: Vision and Challenges of the Commission of National Education

On 21 May 1782, by decree of the Commission of National Education, the name of Vilnius University was changed to the Main School of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In his inaugural address of 24 November 1781, the new rector Marcin Poczobutt (1728–1810) announced the faculties that would be formed and that, for the first time in university history, medical sciences would be taught – in the medical college (*Collegium Medicum*). This important date marked not only the beginnings of formal medical education at the university, but also the emergence of modern medicine in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). Previous historiography extensively discussed the late start of medical education in the GDL and the possible reasons for it. But little attention has been paid to the circumstances which allowed for the establishment of the medical college and the challenges associated with the introduction of lectures on medical subjects at Vilnius University. These particular issues are going to be the main focus of this presentation. The establishment of the medical college will be discussed within the broader context of scientific development in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Western Europe.

After the suppression of the Jesuit Order in 1773, Vilnius University became a secular institution of higher learning under the authority of a Commission of National Education for Poland and Lithuania. This presentation will analyze this commission's vision of how medicine and the natural sciences were to be reformed at Vilnius University. It will also discuss the challenges faced by this commission in establishing the medical college and how those challenges were met. This presentation will also look at the study program for the medical college within the context of Enlightenment-era medical education in Western Europe.