

Faculty of Health, Catholic University in Ružomberok – 20 Years of Its Existence

Catholic University in Ružomberok, Faculty of Health Sciences

After 1989, the Military Hospital in Ružomberok underwent significant development. New departments were gradually established, including dialysis, CT unit, interventional radiology, magnetic resonance imaging, nuclear medicine, neurosurgery, vascular surgery, diagnostic and surgical endoscopy, transfusion medicine, and other specialized departments. Thanks to its strategic location, technical equipment, and the quality of healthcare services provided, the hospital was designated in 1994 as the Central Military Hospital of the Slovak National Uprising under the leadership of Igor Čombor, who directed it from 1990 until 2012. In 2003, a merger of civilian and military healthcare services took place in Ružomberok. The state and military hospitals were integrated into one institution, with the Central Military Hospital of the SNP in Ružomberok becoming the successor organization.

On July 1, 2000, the Catholic University in Ružomberok was established by the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia with the approval of state authorities, as a public higher education institution. Initially, three faculties operated within the university – the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Arts, and the Faculty of Theology. Based on the initiative of experts, especially from northern Slovakia, the university applied for accreditation and launched bachelor's study programs in Nursing and Social Work. The Faculty of Education of the Catholic University created the conditions for establishing the "Institute of Health and Social Work." The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, upon the recommendation of the Accreditation Commission in accordance with §109, section 2 of Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on Higher Education, granted the Faculty of Education of CU in Ružomberok, effective August 1, 2002, the right to conduct state examinations in the bachelor's study program in Nursing. At that time, the university already possessed a well-developed

infrastructure in the areas of psychological and pedagogical training, language education, informatics, and biology. The Central Military Hospital in Ružomberok was approached to assume the role of guarantor and participate in the teaching of nursing and medical blocks, as well as in providing practical training and internships. With the agreement of both parties, the Central Military Hospital of the SNP in Ružomberok became the primary teaching base. Interest from other regions of Slovakia gradually emerged in participating in the educational process, leading to cooperation with hospitals in Levoča, Poprad, Košice, and with the Institute for Respiratory Diseases and Tuberculosis in Vyšné Hágy.

In the academic year 2004/2005, following successful accreditation, the second cycle of university study in Nursing was added to the first cycle. Additionally, the bachelor's program in Midwifery received accreditation. The Institute of Health and Social Work expanded its cooperation with domestic and international institutions in the fields of non-medical and medical sciences in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Austria. Given the specific nature of nursing education, the growing number of students, and the demanding conceptual collaboration with hospitals, the need arose to establish an independent faculty. Based on the decision of the Accreditation Commission of the Government of the Slovak Republic from June 1, 2005, and following approval by the Academic Senate of the Catholic University in Ružomberok on June 27, 2005, the Rector of CU established the Faculty of Health with its seat in Ružomberok on July 1, 2005. This faculty became the successor organization of the original Institute of Health and Social Work. Thus, a fourth faculty – the Faculty of Health – was added to the existing three faculties of the Catholic University.

The Faculty of Health had to meet a number of demanding criteria. Above all, it needed to focus

on the development of education and scientific research within accredited study programs. The programs were designed in a modern way and were fully compatible with similar international programs. The faculty had to be built and developed in terms of both personnel and material-technical resources. The content and ideological concept of the faculty was structured to prepare graduates for professional healthcare work in modern society. It was necessary to establish individual departments, equip lecture halls, classrooms, libraries, information networks, and other workspaces with the necessary infrastructure. The faculty's activities became an integral part of the long-term strategy of the Catholic University and its development in the context of society's needs. The faculty subscribed to Christian morality, academic freedom, and the equality of all people. In this spirit, the education of students has taken place and continues to this day.



Fig. 1 Headquarters of the Faculty of Health of the Catholic University located in the premises of the Central Military Hospital of the Slovak National Uprising in Ružomberok since 2005
(photo: archives of the Faculty of Health, CU)



Fig. 2 Dean of the Faculty, Anton Lacko and Jozef Kvetenský
(photo: archives of the Faculty of Health, CU, 2006)



Fig. 3 Faculty of Health CU lecturer Helena Kuberova



Fig. 4 Faculty of Health CU lecturer Helena Kaducakova



Fig. 5 1st Annual Ružomberok Healthcare Days Conference – 2006
(photo: archives of the Faculty of Health, CU)

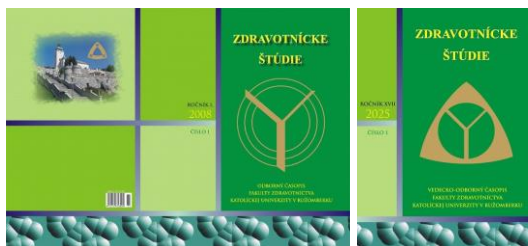


Fig. 6 The first issue of the scientific-professional journal “Healthcare Studies” was published in 2008; the 17th volume is being released in 2025 – Proposed cover design.

In 2009, thanks to its collaboration with the Faculty of Health of the Catholic University in Ružomberok, the Central Military Hospital of the Slovak National Uprising in Ružomberok was included in the network of teaching hospitals in Slovakia. In cooperation with the Dean of the Faculty of Health, the Director of the Central Military Hospital SNP Ružomberok–Teaching Hospital established individual clinical departments that began serving as teaching bases for the faculty. This created space for scientific, research, and medical development, as well as the implementation of new diagnostic and treatment procedures utilizing modern technology.



Fig. 7 Speeches by the Director of the Central Military Hospital, Igor Combor, the Rector of the Catholic University, Tadeusz Zasępa and the Dean of the Faculty of Health, Anton Lacko on the occasion of the designation of the Central Military Hospital SNP Ružomberok as a Teaching Hospital

under the official name Central Military Hospital SNP Ružomberok – FN (photo: archives of the Faculty of Health, CU, June 2009)



Fig. 8 Visit of the Rector of the Catholic University, Tadeusz Zasępa, to the Faculty of Health (with Dean of the Faculty, Anton Lacko, on the occasion of final preparations before building approval) (photo: archives of the Faculty of Health, CU, February 2010)



Fig. 9 Welcome of the diocesan Bishop of Spis, Mons. Frantisek Tondra, by the Rector of the Catholic University, Tadeusz Zasępa, during the blessing of the new building of the Faculty of Health, CU (photo: archives of the Faculty of Health, CU, April 14, 2010)



Fig. 10 New building of the Faculty of Health, Catholic University in Ružomberok (photo: archives of the Faculty of Health, CU, summer 2010)

For 20 years now, the Faculty of Health has been providing education in non-medical health sciences. Full-time bachelor's study is offered in the study programs of *Physiotherapy*, *Laboratory Diagnostic Methods*, *Radiological Technology*, *Emergency Medical Care*, *Nursing*, and *Public Health*. In part-time form, the bachelor's program in *Nursing* continues. Follow-up master's and doctoral studies are conducted in the *Physiotherapy* program.

The Faculty of Health is also authorized to provide postgraduate education in specialized fields such as *Nursing Care for Adults*, *Care for Critically Ill Patients*, and in the certification program *Functional Diagnostic Methods*. Teaching and scientific-research activities at the Faculty are carried out through the following departments: the Department of Physiotherapy, Emergency Medical Care, Radiological Technology, Laboratory Diagnostic Methods, Nursing, and Public Health.

Instruction is conducted at several clinical training bases, including:

- Central Military Hospital SNP Ruzomberok – Teaching Hospital
- Eastern Slovak Oncology Institute, Kosice
- Institute of Nuclear and Molecular Medicine, Kosice
- Department of Radiation Oncology, FNŠP Zilina
- Lower Orava Hospital with Polyclinic MUDr. L. N. Jegeho, Dolný Kubín
- Poprad Hospital, a. s.
- National Rehabilitation Centre Kovacova
- Lúčky Spa, a. s.
- MRI centers Medicentrum, s. r. o. and Spinn, s. r. o., Ružomberok
- Emergency Medical Services: Falck Rescue, a. s., Rescue Service Kosice, Mountain Rescue Service, Emergency Medical Dispatch Centre of the Slovak Republic
- SALUS VITALIS, o. z., Slovak Red Cross
- Regional Public Health Offices in Dolný Kubín, Liptovský Mikuláš, and Poprad
- National Institute of Endocrinology and Diabetology, n. o., Ľubochňa
- General practitioner clinics, ADOS, and Spis Catholic Charity

Our sincere and heartfelt thanks go to all these institutions and their employees for their support and cooperation.

The Faculty of Health strives to intensify international mobility for students and teachers, especially with universities in the Czech Republic, Poland, Spain, and Slovenia. The faculty actively seeks to participate in scientific projects at both national and international levels. One of the faculty's key missions is to support student scientific and professional activities. A continual priority is the improvement of material and technical infrastructure.



Fig. 11 Consecration of the Faculty of Health to Blessed Sister Zdenka

In the 2019/20 academic year, the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the Catholic University, including the Faculty of Health. As a protective measure against droplet infection, preventive actions were immediately implemented at the faculty. These included limiting personal contact between employees, maintaining safe distancing, handwashing, and the wearing of face masks. The use of shared spaces was managed through regular disinfection of premises, contact surfaces, and hands. A key measure was the introduction of body temperature screening at the entrance to the faculty premises. Germicidal lamps were installed in classrooms and communal areas. A special thermal camera with a low measurement deviation was purchased for the faculty, which triggered an alarm when a temperature exceeded 37.3 °C. This measure was positively evaluated by the regional Public Health Authority and the Ministry of Education.

The epidemiological situation significantly disrupted the teaching process, resulting in a transition to distance learning and interfering with

planned research activities. The faculty's epidemiological management was guided by the measures of the Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic and directives from the Rector of the Catholic University and the Dean of the Faculty of Health. Practical teaching had to be adapted to the current conditions in each healthcare facility. During the summer semester, faculty members focused on preparing study materials for online teaching, continuous assessment, and examinations. To support these activities, the faculty purchased new webcams and microphones.

In January 2022, the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Caputová, received representatives of the emergency services at the Presidential Palace, including healthcare paramedics who also serve as lecturers at the Faculty of Health of the Catholic University in Ružomberok: Frantisek Majersky – President of the Slovak Chamber of Paramedics (SKZZ), Imrich Andrási – Secretary General of SKZZ, and Dagmar Tomcanyova – Chairwoman of the Trade Union Commission of SKZZ. The President thanked them for their work during the year 2021, which was marked by the continuing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Fig. 12 President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Caputová, received representatives of

In November 2021, the 15th edition of the international scientific conference “Ružomberok Healthcare Days” took place. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was held in an online format. The high professional standard of the event was confirmed by 95 lectures, 31 of which were delivered by international participants.

In 2022, the Faculty of Health successfully completed the alignment of its study programs with the standards of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education. Following the receipt of a positive opinion from the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, all accredited study programs

have been implemented without restrictions since September 1, 2022. These include the programs *Physiotherapy* (at all three levels), *Laboratory Diagnostic Methods in Healthcare*, *Radiological Technology*, *Emergency Medical Care*, *Nursing* (in both full-time and part-time forms), and *Public Health*.

Representatives of the Faculty of Health were also actively involved in international projects. The faculty became a partner in the project “Active Barrier-Free Education for Seniors (ASEB)” led by the University of Ostrava. A significant outcome of the project was an original international songbook, online courses on cultural heritage, and a pilot implementation in a senior environment. The project was successfully completed in May 2023.

In 2022, the 16th edition of the Ružomberok Healthcare Days was held, featuring leading experts from both domestic and international institutions. The scientific program was divided into six thematic sections and included 71 professional presentations.



Fig. 13 Opening of the 16th online edition of Ružomberok Healthcare Days

In 2023, Helena Kaducaková a long-standing and active expert in the field of nursing, was appointed as a professor in the discipline of *Nursing*.

Students of the Faculty of Health regularly participated in professional competitions. In 2023, they represented the faculty in the “Florence of the Year” competition, where they gained valuable practical experience and received professional recognition.



Fig. 14 Participation of Faculty of Health students in the “Florence of the Year” competition



Fig. 15 Participation of students from the Faculty of Health, Department of Emergency Medical Care, in the MUDr. Jann Kovalcik Memorial

Students of the Faculty of Health of the Catholic University participated in a rescue competition. The 12th edition of the MUDr. Jan Kovalcik Memorial was held in the cadastral area of the village of Lipovce. Among the members of both competing and winning teams were several graduates of the bachelor's study program *Emergency Medical Care*.

In the 2022/23 academic year, lectures in the specialized military subject *Introduction to Military Healthcare* were launched during the summer semester. The course was met with positive feedback and concluded with a ceremonial awarding of students, attended by representatives of the Central Military Hospital Ružomberok–Teaching Hospital and the leadership of the Faculty of Health.



Fig. 16 Awarding of healthcare students – graduates of the specialized military course, with representatives of the Faculty of Health and the Central Military Hospital SNP

At the end of 2023, the Faculty of Health hosted a visit from the working group of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education as part of the evaluation of the internal quality assurance system at the Catholic University. Based on the evaluation results, the Executive Board of SAAVŠ decided on April 11, 2024, that the Catholic University is authorized to create, implement, and modify study programs in the field of *Nursing* at the first level of higher education, in the field of

Health Sciences at the first, second, and third levels of higher education, and in the field of *Public Health* at the first level of higher education.

In 2024, the Faculty of Health co-organized the 14th edition of the conference “*Family – Health – Illness*” in Zlín, together with Tomas Bata University in Zlín and its Faculty of Humanities.



Fig. 17 Participation of Faculty of Health lecturers at the conference in Zlín

In September 2024, the Department of Nursing welcomed Polish experts from Białystok and Jarosław, who presented joint research focused on the issue of workload and burnout syndrome among nurses.



Fig. 18 Visit from Poland

After four years, the Faculty of Health resumed the in-person format of the 18th edition of the international conference *Ružomberok Healthcare Days 2024*. The conference opened with speeches by the Rector of the Catholic University, Jaroslav Demko and the President of the conference and Dean of the Faculty of Health, Anton Lacko. In their addresses, both emphasized the importance of international exchange of scientific knowledge, which serves as a key to positive changes in healthcare. Their speeches also touched on the future direction of the Faculty of Health at the Catholic University. The event was attended by representatives of the Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikulas, as well as representatives of the Medical Service Command of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic based in Ružomberok.



Fig. 19 Opening of the 18th edition of Ruzomberok Healthcare Days (November 2024)

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The Faculty of Health of the Catholic University in Ruzomberok, in cooperation with the Žilina Self-Governing Region, co-organized the international conference *4th Žilina Oncogynecological Day*. The Faculty was also a co-organizer of the *14th Nationwide Conference of Nurses Working in Anesthesiology and Intensive Care*.

Additionally, the Faculty participated in several national KEGA research projects focused on promoting health literacy and nutrition among at-risk patients. The results were presented through seminars, workshops, and a poster session in October 2023.



Fig. 20 Faculty of Health lecturers at a professional event

On February 6, 2025, the Faculty of Health co-organized the international online conference *“Health as the Foundation of Sustainable Development in the EU”*, hosted by the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The main topics focused on innovations and challenges in the healthcare sector within the framework of sustainable development.

The synergy between the scientific and pedagogical activities of the Faculty of Health and the Central Military Hospital SNP Ružomberok–Teaching Hospital is culminating in the

advancement of both institutions. Planned projects for the near future involve the redevelopment of infrastructure for both the hospital and the faculty. These include the renovation of surgical and internal medicine pavilions, the construction of an oncology center with a cyclotron and nuclear medicine complex. The Clinic of Nuclear Medicine has already been upgraded with new equipment. The Faculty of Health is preparing documentation for a project to expand into new premises on Andrej Hlinka Square. All these plans remain visions, and—as in the past—their realization is ultimately in God's hands.



Fig. 21 New medical equipment at the Clinic of Nuclear Medicine (Starguide gamma camera) in the Central Military Hospital SNP Ruzomberok–Teaching Hospital



Fig. 22 Project of the new “Oncology Center” at the Central Military Hospital SNP Ruzomberok–Teaching Hospital



Fig. 23 Extension project of the Faculty of Health