Katarzyna Pękacka-Falkowska (Poznań):
City Physicians in Early Modern Thorn:
Johann Thomas von Soemmerring and the Lung Float Test: a Case Study

In the 17th and 18th centuries the city physicians of Thorn/Toruń were graduating from the Universities of Basel, Jena, Halle, Leiden, Wittenberg etc. They regularly published in "Miscellanea Curiosa", were active members of the Republic of Letters, carried on correspondence with the most prominent physicians of their times, implemented numerous institutional changes in the local public health system etc.

In my paper I would focus on one of the 18th century Thorn’s Stadt-Physici, Johann Thomas von Soemmerring (born in Launeburg/Pommern/1701, died in Thorn/Royal Prussia/1781), who in numerous writings of Western-European historians and philosophers appears only as “a father of his son” Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring. Yet that graduate of universities of Halle and Leiden, where he studied medicine under Friedrich Hoffmann, Herman Boerhaave, and Bernhard Albin ,was not only an influential City Doctor, but also one of the most notable figures of scientific life in early modern Royal Prussia (in the age of enlightenment). Johann Thomas von Soemmerring reformed both the system of health care in Thorn (e.g. local midwifery, as he somewhat implemented O poryadochnom uchrezhdennii babich’yeva dela v pol’zu obshchestwa published by Panajota Condoidi in 1754 in Sankt-Petersburg), and a local forensic practice, as he introduced the so-called hydrostatic lung test in the detection of infanticide cases. As a result, Thorn became second – after Danzig – city in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that promoted the above-mentioned method (life test). Accordingly I will analyze various handwritten and printed records in order to answer the question, how the hydrostatic lung test became a standard procedure in Royal Prussia, and how it changed the then judicial procedures.