
LEGENDS IN UROLOGY

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When I was first invited by the *Canadian Journal of Urology* to write an autobiography for their “Legends in Urology” section, I was honored but I declined, since I do not consider myself to be an extraordinary person with accomplishments deserving of this recognition.

However, when my former student and current colleague and friend Alejandro Nolazco, who is on the journal’s Editorial Board, repeated the invitation, I decided to accept it. I sat down to reflect on my activities as a urologist, educator, and “man of the world.”

I was born in Buenos Aires in 1928, when Argentina was in its heyday, a rich country with an excellent educational system. My father was a businessman and my mother was a housewife, and I had a large extended family that included two uncles who were physicians, who no doubt influenced my choice of a future career. We lived in a middle-class neighborhood, not far from where the current Pope Francis was later born. In those days I loved horseback riding for fun, but football (soccer) was my passion, much like some people are passionate about the tango.

I was accepted by the most prestigious Argentinian medical school, the School of Medicine at the University of Buenos Aires, which boasts three Nobel Prize winners. I also obtained a student fellowship to Sweden and Denmark, which gave me the opportunity to visit France, Holland, and the UK—an experience that forever changed my life. I can trace my love of urology to my urology professor, Leonidas Rebaudi, who also influenced me to study music and psychology, to better understand patients’ problems. He became my mentor, and so I began my close relationship with urology. Professor Rebaudi was a gentleman and a scholar. He had been educated in European hospitals in the 1920s and had even had a rotation in Sigmund Freud’s Vienna clinic. In 1954 I received my MD degree, and in 1956 I obtained a PhD, after defending my thesis on BPH treatments.

I married Lilian Weil, my lifelong companion, and I was fortunate to be accepted as a surgery and urology resident at Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Columbia University in New York City, New York; and Memorial University Medical Center in Savannah, Georgia.

After completing my residency I returned home and began working in the urology services at T. Alvarez 1, Israelita Ezrah, de Niños Ricardo Gutierrez, and Instituto Nacional de Rehabilitacion del Lisiado. I was awarded and accepted a fellowship through the Organizacion de Estados Americanos at the Spinal Cord Injury Service, VA Long Beach Healthcare System, in long Beach, California. I joined the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Buenos Aires, where I rose in the ranks to become Associate Professor of Urology, a position I held until my retirement in 1994 and where I still hold the honorary position of Consultant. I was elected as a member of the Argentine Council of Medical Bioethics.

Upon my retirement, I asked myself, “What can I do for my country?” Since I had the opportunity of training and working as a young urologist in several foreign countries, I was very interested in fostering international relations among young urologists. One way to do this is to set up international fellowships and residency-exchange programs, which has the added benefit of bringing back new ideas that could improve our specialty. Echoing these beliefs about the value of international experience, on July 31, 2014 at the University Rectors’ Meeting in Rio de Janeiro,

Won Ke, President of Nankai University, in China, declared: “At our university we try [to ensure] that our teaching staff should have at least 1 year of international experience before being promoted.”

I became a board member and then President of the Argentina Society of Urology / Sociedad Argentina de Urologia and a board member and then President of the American Confederation of Urology / Confederacion Americana de Urologia (CAU). I am a co-founder of the Latin America Society of Pediatric Urology and, with a group of French and Latin American urologists, a co-founder of the Ass. Pour les Echanges Urologiques France-Amerique Latine.

There has always been a connection between Latin American, European, and North American urologists, but CAU actively promoted institutional links that offered more opportunities to young urologists to establish new connections and opened up possibilities for foreign exchanges. We began to implement fellowship programs with Claude Bollack, Department of Urology, in Strasbourg, and Jean Marie Brisset, at the Centre de la Port de Choissy, in Paris; these two urologists received about 80 fellows. We implemented other fellowship programs with C. Shulman (Universite Libre, Brussels, Belgium), B. Lobel (Rennes, France), Philip Smith (Leeds, UK), R. Vela Navarrete (Madrid, Spain), A. Zungri, (Vigo, Spain) Valdivia Uria (Zaragoza, Spain), and H. Villavicencio and F. Sole Balcells (Barcelona, Spain). Y. Aso and O. Yoshida and many others from The Japanese Foundation for Research & Promotion of Endoscopy received a number of Latin-American urologists. There was also an important network of relationships involving Mexico and Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and other South American countries. Spanish and Portuguese societies joined the CAU as full members. For a time there was a CAU German branch and I represented the CAU at a joint urology meeting in Bonn that was hosted by W. Vahlensieck.

The AUA also provided a wealth of new opportunities and programs in connection with CAU. Our Uruguay-born friend, Schlomo Raz organized the first and highly successful AUA-CAU Spanish Urology Meeting at the 1973 San Francisco Congress. This year in Orlando, 1800 urologists attended the AUA-CAU Spanish Meeting.

The group leading these international activities were a sort of “band of brothers” that I belonged to, which included Nelson Rodrigues Netto, Sami Arap, Raul Lopez Engelking, Alfredo Kaufman, Hernan Carrion, Carlos Garcia Irigoyen, Remigio Vela Navarrete, Thyne Larson, Victor Politano, and many others, who became lifelong friends.

Realizing that Bolivia was rather isolated from the mainstream practice of urology, a special program was established in endoscopic surgery whereby the AUA loaned the equipment, and volunteers went to Bolivia to train local urologists in the surgical techniques.

At the SIU I was the Argentinean delegate, a member of the board, Chairman at the Strategic Planning Committee, and Chairman of the Local Organizing Committee for the 2005 conference in Bariloche, Patagonia, Argentina.

At the SIU, Centennial Congress in Paris, on September 1, 2007, I was presented with the SIU Distinguished Career Award. Congress President Richard Fourcade noted that “As current President of the Association for Echanges Urologiques France–Amerique Latine, it is particularly fitting for Paris to be the site of this presentation.”

I am an Honorary Member of the Asociacion Medica Argentina, the American Urological Association, the Sociedad Brasileira de Urologia, the Sociedad Boliviana de Urologia, and the Sociedad Cuyana de Urologia.

In summary, my greatest wish has been to improve connections among urologists within Latin America and between those in Latin America and the rest of the world. I believe that although we now live in a globalized, better-connected world, urologists in Latin America (and elsewhere) should still strive to maintain scientific standards at the highest level, and try to build close relationships with fellow urologists in other countries—building on historical links and creating new links—since our patients, even those living in remote and disadvantaged locations, should get the best possible medical care, given existing circumstances. We should also share our own experiences with urologists in other parts of the world, and last but not least, we should respect local cultural characteristics.

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