

In memoriam

Miguel Torner Soler



Last September, our beloved friend and mentor, Dr. Miguel Torner Soler, passed away at the age of nearly 90 years. Dr. Torner's teaching and academic activities had been waning for some time, but he continued to guide our approach to our daily cardiology activities and we are left feeling orphaned.

Dr. Torner was born in Barcelona, Spain, and studied at the city's Faculty of Medicine. He felt an inclination for the incipient specialty of cardiology, which had arisen from the growing use of the electrocardiogram and the sophistication of auscultation. His exceptional gift for clinical observation and his semiotic skills enabled him to become interested in a field bereft of knowledge, which was the case of the study of congenital heart disease. In terms of his medical training, he was basically self-taught, although in the area of congenital heart disease he was strongly influenced by the prestigious School of Lyon in France (Drs. J. Bret and P. Santy) during a stay lasting several months in the city's hospitals. At that time, French cardiology was highly influential in Spain, and Dr. Torner remained faithful to this influence throughout his life, as shown by his translation of the lengthy treatise *Précis de Clinique Cardiovasculaire* by Professor R. Froment of Lyon to Spanish in 1967. The French influence on his training did not prevent him from showing an increasing appreciation of the valuable contributions of the English school, led by Dr. P. Wood, as demonstrated by his translation of Wood's *Diseases of the Heart and Circulation* to Spanish in 1961. Both works had a highly positive and long-lasting impact on the training of future Spanish-speaking cardiologists.

Dr. Torner and Dr. Balaguer, who were volunteers in the Cardiology Clinic of the Department of Medical Pathology led by Prof. J. Gibert-Queraltó of the Faculty of Medicine of Barcelona, spurred the latter's interest in cardiology, and their efforts were rewarded by the inauguration of the School of Cardioangiology of the University of Barcelona in 1952. The impetus provided by Drs. Torner and Balaguer was reinforced by the contribution of the Institute of Cardiology of Mexico, through Dr. A. Casellas, who had been a fellow there. Thus, the School of Cardiology included a group of professionals with eclectic knowledge of cardiology and was able to combine the most valuable lessons from the various schools and offer them to its students in 2-year courses attended

by physicians from all over Spain. The present authors are both grateful and proud to count themselves among this group.

The "School" was not limited to its teaching activities, but also contributed considerably to cardiology research both nationally and internationally, as shown by the 4 original articles published between 1955 and 1958 in the *American Heart Journal*, which at that time was the most prestigious cardiology journal on the international scene. These articles included clinical-electrocardiographic-hemodynamic correlations as, despite very rudimentary technical means (a fluoroscope, a manometer, and an oximeter) and their exposure to very considerable doses of radiation, Dr. Torner and his collaborators carried out right heart catheterizations, which enabled them to perform magnificent studies that are still valid today. Their enthusiasm for cardiac hemodynamics was not confined to exploring the right heart; they also catheterized the left ventricle and were the first to obtain recordings in the interior of this chamber, as reported in the proceedings of the First World Congress of Cardiology, held in Paris in 1950, and in the review article by Zimmerman et al (*Circulation*. 1950;1:357).

The infrastructure of the School of Cardiology of *Hospital Clínic* in Barcelona was poor and could not be improved, a need that was especially pressing given its growing prestige; furthermore new knowledge made it imperative to upgrade the facilities in terms of both technological resources and space. Aware of these considerations, in 1960, Dr. Torner and his coworkers moved to the new *Centro de la Lucha Contra las Cardiopatías* (Center for the Prevention of Heart Disease) of the Spanish National Health System, located in the port of Barcelona. Although this center's resources were better (hospitalization, with no coronary care unit), it was not suitable for the treatment of an emerging disease (ischemic heart disease) or for cardiac surgery, which was developing at an unprecedented rate. Despite these insurmountable limitations, the enthusiasm of Dr. Torner and his collaborators did not falter and, in 1970, the group moved *en masse* to the *Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau*, where they were finally able to consolidate their medical and scientific efforts.

The prestige of the School of Cardiology, as well as that of Dr. Torner, continued to grow in Spain, and, in 1971, he was named president of the Spanish Society of Cardiology and, later, a full member of the *Reial Acadèmia de Medicina de Barcelona*.

Dr. Torner's arduous professional pilgrimage came to an end at the *Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau*, to which he remained faithful until the final years of his life. He continued his lifelong activities, regularly attending the Congenital Heart Disease Clinic and clinical discussion sessions as a volunteer physician. Importantly, he was never officially a member of any hospital staff, nor was he a university professor. His teaching skills were unsurpassable, an attainment of the very few; they included his pristine knowledge, spirit, and steadfast determination to be generous to those who wanted to learn.

We wish to take advantage of these few words to convey our deepest sympathy to his children (unfortunately, his beloved wife, Sunchi, is no longer with us), especially Pelayo, who is following in his father's footsteps with great dedication and enthusiasm. We

would like them to know that we are and will always be indebted to him. For this reason, we willingly agreed to write this obituary, and are confident that it reflects the feelings of all of his disciples all over Spain. The long scientific discussions we shared with him over a period of several years, in the tiny dispensary of *Hospital Clínic* and, later, in the Center for the Prevention of Heart Disease in the

port of Barcelona, have left an indelible mark on both our professional and personal lives. Thank you, beloved maestro.

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