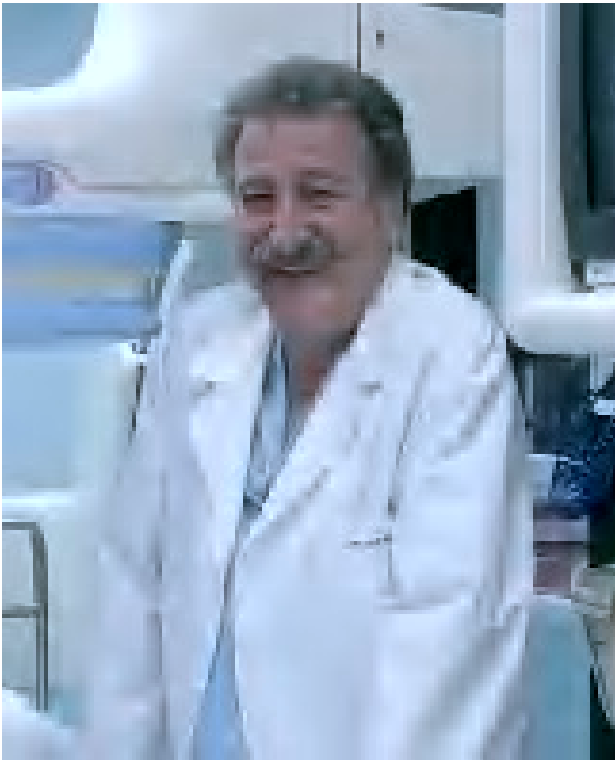


José Luis Martínez de Ubago Ruiz de la Cuesta (1943-2005)



Dr. Martínez de Ubago.

Dr. Martínez passed away on December 9, 2005, in Vitoria, Spain, aged 62 years.

Born in Mondragón, he studied medicine at the University of Valladolid (1962-1967) before starting work at the University Clinic of Navarre in the Cardiovascular and Respiratory Department (1968-1974). He was made Circulatory System Specialist by the University of Navarre. In 1974, he founded the Catheterization Laboratory in the Department of Diagnostic Radiology of the Hospital Marqués de Valdecilla in Santander, where he remained until October 1987. From this year onward, he embarked on a new project to set up catheterization laboratories in private health centers (Gipuzkoa Polyclinic in San Sebastián, Fátima Clinic in Vigo, Polyclinic San José in Vitoria, the Clinic Reyes Católicos in Burgos).

At places where many thought catheterization techniques and heart surgery would not prosper, we not only made them possible but also respected. We have initiated so many projects...

As he himself would say, “I have lived through all the developments in modern intravascular and cardiac navigation.” His constant striving for improvement was apparent from his early days in Pamplona, where he designed catheters from a reel of plastic tubes, through to his collaboration in producing sophisticated valvuloplasty balloons. His studies of mitral valve elasticity by angiographic methods, which were published in 1977, as well as his studies of the dynamics of the tricuspid valve annulus and right ventricular function, along with extravalvular factors affecting the left ventricular and atrial drainage, made a fundamental contribution to establishing the early indications for conservative mitral and tricuspid valve surgery.

It was in the eighties when the dilatation techniques appeared and, on September 19, 1980, he performed the first percutaneous coronary angioplasty in Spain. This was followed by pulmonary valvuloplasties (1982-1983), mitral valvuloplasties (1985), and aortic valvuloplasties (first without extracorporeal percutaneous circulation in 1987 and the with percutaneous circulation in 1990).

Dr. Martínez de Ubago was never content with conformity and was always searching for potential new designs, applications, and techniques to improve diagnosis and catheterization procedures for the patient. He was always on the move. When he wasn’t improving his surgical technique he was writing up a medical report, or working on computer applications, instantaneous image transmission to the family physician, connection between different care centers, etc.

Dr. Ubago was an outgoing person, ready to transmit his ideas as “nobody will remember you for your secret thoughts,” affable, and, above all, a good colleague. Those of us fortunate enough to have shared almost everything with him, both professionally and personally, have been enriched by his company—he was an excellent team player, always pushing forward, never conforming. He wanted to live as fast as time would allow, acquiring new experiences. Downtime was, for him, a waste of precious time.

But José Luis Martínez de Ubago was also a shy man who stuck by his own, who always reminisced of his dismay when, in his first examinations, there was not enough space to accommodate his long surnames. He loved his mother so much that he always insisted on including his “maternal surname,” as is the tradition in

Spain, even if it meant using the margin of the page. He always played at the scatterbrain, and so his apologies were accepted and he managed to break the molds of conformity and he did so with plenty of charm.

And Ubago also had a mischievous streak. In his youth, he was a fine sportsman. Those of us who have been around him from when he was in his thirties would be shown photos from his childhood and youth, winning races and jumps. At the anniversary of his Marianistas school in Vitoria, we saw the originals of those photos. He had trimmed them so he would appear the winner. How he laughed when we found out.

A scatterbrain, or so he pretended at least. A forgetful man, or rather, one who appeared so. Such were the strategies he used to earn the confidence and trust of those around him. He forgot almost nothing, and was perfectly aware of what he was doing at all times. One of the things that he found hardest to bring himself to do was the medical reports. This, I believe, was behind his decision to leave Valdecilla and start a new professional direction—the hundreds of reports still awaiting him!

A dearest friend of mine, my colleague for more than 30 years, Dr. Ubago leaves behind a legacy in the world of catheterization procedures and cardiac surgery. We were always a team, complementing one another, working shoulder to shoulder, together. We played the good-guy bad-guy routine innocently and without reproach, knowing we complemented one another, a routine perhaps impossible today. I will continue to travel along the path that we had opened up with our endeavor, the project to which we have dedicated our lives and owe our livelihood.

We will miss you. I will miss you. The pain of losing you is great, but worse would have been never to have known you.

Ignacio Gallo

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