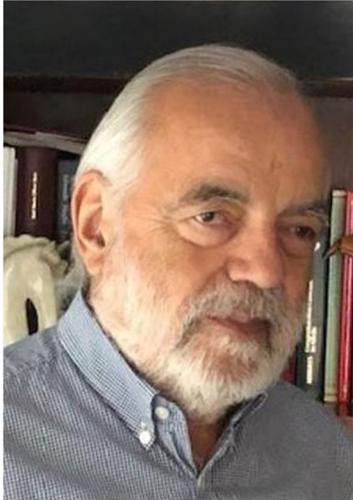


In memoriam

José María Oliver Ruiz



*“We must celebrate in due course such a great career/life,
colleague and friend”*

–Michael Gatzoulis, Royal Brompton Hospital, London

On Saturday July 2, 2022, José María Oliver Ruiz died suddenly and unexpectedly. He was Chief of the Adult Congenital Heart Disease Unit in La Paz Hospital and Associate Professor of Medicine in the Autonomous University of Madrid. Our pain is somewhat alleviated by the knowledge that we have delighted for almost a lifetime in his outstanding qualities as a human being, professional, and teacher.

In reality, after the shuttling of so many manuscripts between his mailbox and mine in the last 25 years, I never thought that I, together with Ana González, would have to write this text. It is as difficult as accurately capturing in a photograph a unique landscape seen with your own two eyes.

Dr Oliver—or Pepe Oliver for most of his colleagues and friends—was one of the most well-known figures in Spanish cardiology in recent decades. He was born in Tetuán (Morocco) on December 19, 1948, where his father served as a military attorney in the Air Force, but soon moved to Madrid, where he spent most of his life. However, with roots in Cartagena and sentimental ties to the Mediterranean, it was in Cabo de Palos (Murcia), next to the imposing lighthouse standing on the headland, where he liked to rest and shelter from the blustery winds of life.

He graduated in Medicine and Surgery from the Complutense University of Madrid in 1971. After residency in the Jiménez Díaz Foundation (1971–1976), he obtained the titles of Specialist in Internal Medicine (1981) and Cardiology (1983). After a public competition, he then joined La Paz Hospital as an attending physician in Cardiology (1977), with José A. Sobrino Daza as department chief, from whom he took over as Medical Director of

the General Hospital from 1983 to 1985. This institute was the setting for his stellar professional development. He belonged to the select group of cardiologists who were legends in cardiac imaging and who developed the echocardiography technique in Spain. His knowledge of the technique and his extraordinary anatomical and pathophysiological insights were key reasons why the recently deceased Felipe Moreno, head of the Pediatric Cardiology Service of the La Paz Children’s Hospital, requested him for the follow-up of patients in adulthood. He thereby became a pioneer in the development of the adult congenital heart disease discipline in Spain. In 1993, he visited the units of the Mayo Clinic (Rochester, Minnesota) and University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). His doctoral thesis, *“Cardiopatías Congénitas del Adulto. Cambios en el espectro de las malformaciones cardíacas durante la vida adulta y análisis de las lesiones residuales, secuelas y complicaciones a largo plazo. Un estudio de 1.500 pacientes consecutivos”* [“Adult Congenital Heart Disease. Changes in the spectrum of cardiac malformations during adult life and analysis of residual lesions, sequelae, and long-term complications. A study of 1500 consecutive patients”], presented in 1997, is a true must-read textbook, and the adult congenital heart disease unit that he directed was the first of its kind in Spain, hosting the training of medical specialists from the entire country. Undeniably, he led this complex field of cardiovascular medicine and achieved well-deserved international recognition in just a few decades, a direct result of his vast and exceptional scientific achievements.

Pepe Oliver was an excellent physician and cardiologist. In the words of one of his most accomplished disciples, “Rafa” Alonso-González (Toronto General Hospital): “the best clinical cardiologist the world has known”. He fostered a strong bond with his patients, who appreciated his empathy, his relaxed and warm style of communication, and the trust that he conveyed. Many of them have mourned his passing. He was a student of medicine who dedicated himself voraciously and persistently to acquiring knowledge, which he uniquely used to solve problems. He had an extraordinary ability to apply the information gained from patient interviews and examinations to clinical reasoning and to use procedures and techniques in disease research and management. Always ready to attend any consultation, his ability to resolve the most complex questions made him the person whom we all turned to for difficult cases and whose opinion was always awaited at the end of the discussions. And he took his time, made us wait...perhaps because he wanted to listen to the others and not to render judgment with his unmistakably deep and personal voice.

Although his patients were always the axis of his work, his measured and indelible intellectual curiosity were not halted by his unjust and involuntary forced retirement in 2013 (“due to age”). As “the oldest fellow in Spain”, in his own words, he then got involved in the creation of Spanish Network for Research into Adult Congenital Heart Disease, leading multicenter projects from the Foundation for Biomedical Research of Gregorio Marañón Hospital.

In addition to medicine, Pepe loved to travel, read, and walk. He was a true Renaissance man, open to all types of knowledge and

art, with interests in philosophy, history, literature, music, architecture, and politics, and not just superficially, but at great depths. He was a great conversationalist and was probably the person whose experiences and anecdotes of all types we have most enjoyed hearing and sharing.

A family man, the exceptional and proud father of Antonio and Emilio and dear grandfather to Nerea, Sergio, Martina, and Diego, he excelled as a tutor and teacher for various generations of cardiology residents, for whom he was mentor and inspiration. He advised, motivated, and challenged us to be the best that we could be, both personally and professionally. In the purest Hellenistic style, in his presence, we felt like students who could relish and grow through the fellowship and teachings of one of the great scholars.

Pepe Oliver has left a great legacy that will live on forever in the passion and professional commitment that he instilled in everyone who worked with him. Those of us who were lucky enough to meet and collaborate with him will remember him for his considerable intellectual vigor, his professionalism, and his profound humanity and generosity. Thanks for everything, Pepe. You will always be in our hearts, which are now a little more broken.

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