Tribute to Professor Bernardo Leo Wajchenberg

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This is the first document published in English in the “Revista ALAD” since the journal became an open access publication. We will include original or review papers written in English in the upcoming issues of our journal to eliminate any potential language barriers to disseminate the contributions of Latin American diabetes community to the field. By doing this adaptation to the policies of our journal, we will honor the permanent effort of Dr. Wajchenberg (as many other ALAD leaders) to propagate science and education worldwide.

Carlos Aguilar-Salinas y Yulino Castillo Núñez
Editors of “Revista ALAD”

The Latin American Diabetes Association (ALAD) expresses our deepest regret for the death of Prof. Bernardo Leo Wajchenberg, a former ALAD president (1972-1974). Author of more than 200 scientific articles, two books and dozens of chapters in publications and mentor of hundreds of Brazilian endocrinologists, Dr. Wajchenberg has left a solid legacy to the diabetes field. His multiple contributions were recognized with the “Bernardo Houssay Award,” the biggest prize given by ALAD. To honor his memory, the editors of the “Revista ALAD” asked an essay to Dr. Arturo Rolla in which he presents a personal portrait of the character and contributions of Dr. Wajchenberg.

If I had to describe Leonardo with a single word, I would say a “fighter.” Moreover, then he would add “determined.” From the day I met him, we began a continuous academic discussion about many aspects of endocrinology, which lasted for years. Bernardo had various ideas and hypotheses of his own, a result of his superior intelligence, his inquisitive spirit and his long experience as a clinician, researcher and teacher of many Brazilian and Latin American Diabetes Association (ALAD) expresses our deepest regret for the death of Prof. Bernardo Leo Wajchenberg, a former ALAD president (1972-1974). Author of more than 200 scientific articles, two books and dozens of chapters in publications and mentor of hundreds of Brazilian endocrinologists, Dr. Wajchenberg has left a solid legacy to the diabetes field. His multiple contributions were recognized with the “Bernardo Houssay Award,” the biggest prize given by ALAD. To honor his memory, the editors of the “Revista ALAD” asked an essay to Dr. Arturo Rolla in which he presents a personal portrait of the character and contributions of Dr. Wajchenberg.

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American endocrinologists. He did not forgive me any medical expression with which he disagreed; each disagreement ends up in fruitful discussions. I must confess that it was me who learned and supported these intense conversations. Of course, the critical exchange soon expanded to what we had just heard from the other speakers at the congress we were attending. Nobility obliges, I must confess that Bernardo won me almost all the “hormonal storms” that we had in public lectures or sitting in some quiet corner of some event. I am going to miss Bernardo and our conversations in every international event in which we met. Any corridor followed by a “cafezinho” sprinkled with hormones was the perfect place to talk about mechanisms and controversial theories of our own and by others. Still old, Bernardo continued to go to the great endocrine meetings worldwide with the enthusiasm of a 1st-year resident. He was also “firm.” If anything remained unresolved in our discussions, on returning to Sao Paulo, he sends me literature - only the one on his side!

Furthermore, Leo was a perfectionist. To those who do not believe me, I recommend you to talk to the residents and PhD candidates who nourished their experience and direction at the Hospital das Clínicas in São Paulo. There, he started as a medical resident during the 1950’s. Then, he went to the United States, first as a Fellow at the Lilly Research Laboratory at the University of Minnesota, and then he pursued another fellowship at the University of Michigan.

He returned to the University of São Paulo where he started as a Junior Staff and shortly thereafter became Head of the Diabetes and Adrenal Unit. He was later promoted to Chief of the Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism, and finally, before retiring, he was the Vice Director of the Department of Medicine, always in his Hospital das Clínicas.

His interest in endocrinology was very broad. During his career, he published in prestigious diabetes journals. And I would say that the same applies for each one of the endocrine areas. To impress him once, I started talking about adrenal carcinoma. Far from being impressed, he captivated me with his impressive case recollection and experience in this disease. One week later, he sent me one of the most complete articles on this topic that he had published with his Paulista colleagues!

Much could be added here about the Leonardo's contributions to Latin American and world endocrinology. His paper about the metabolic effects of visceral and intra-abdominal fat that he published as the sole author in Endocrine Reviews in 2000 continues to be relevant to our clinical activity today and for future research. Already, Leonardo had been fascinated by the lipodystrophies and the intense insulin resistance they cause. The last time I saw it, as usual, we found ourselves in the corridor of a congress place. “Rolla! (he called me that), do not miss my presentation, I’m going to talk about two villages in northern Brazil where there is a lot of congenital lipodystrophy! It’s going to interest you!” He was right; it was an amazing talk!

If I had to choose the Latin American endocrinologist who made the most, who stood out more, who more disciples formed and more energy and intellect gave to our profession and our specialty, I would not hesitate to name him, Bernardo Leo, emphatically. And I’m sure that, for the first time in our long relationship, he would agree with me!