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Obituary

Ricardo Belda Poujoulet (1947–2023)



On January 8th, Dr Ricardo Belda Poujoulet, who was Head of the Surgery Department at Hospital Universitario Torrecárdenas for 27 years, left us suddenly, unexpectedly and unfairly.

Ricardo Belda Poujoulet was born in North Africa in 1947, in the remote Moroccan town of Aïn Harrouda. The son of a Spanish father and a French mother, he grew up surrounded by a liberal, cultured cosmopolitanism that made his personality not fit the societal patterns of that day and age, bestowing him an air of being shrewd and perceptive, noble but implacable.

After completing his medical studies at the University of Granada, Ricardo Belda Poujoulet trained as a surgeon at the San Cecilio Clinical Hospital in Granada with Professor Ignacio Arcelus Imaz. He was there for ten years and had become the Head of the "Recu" Division—now known as the Recovery Unit—which at that time was managed by surgeons. Even back then, he was already a very active person—not hyperactive, but always active professionally due to his work ethic and inquisitive nature, both inside and outside the hospital. This led to him becoming a pioneer in Spain in the use of parenteral nutrition in surgical patients at a time when, unlike today, the subject of nutrition and surgery was in its infancy and still considered a minor question. As surgeons and as doctors, we must not—and cannot—forget those visionaries who, like Ricardo Belda, blazed trails forward.

In 1985, Dr. Belda Poujoulet ended up in Almería after becoming Head of the Surgery Department of the Complejo <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cireng.2023.11.006> 2173-5077/

Hospitalario Torrecárdenas (Hospital Universitario Torrecárdenas), where he would carry out his work until the end of 2012. There, supported by an excellent team of professionals, he continued with his active and innovative trend and, after training in Lyon with Prof Philippe Mouret, he promoted the development of laparoscopic surgery in Almería. The same year he became Department Head, he established the *Jornadas Quirúrgicas Internacionales de Almería*, a medical conference which reached its nineteenth edition and was especially attractive to young surgeons, given its practical, entertaining and participatory spirit, addressing all sorts of surgical controversies.

Ricardo was the archetypal pillar of the surgical profession, the paradigm of a "surgeon maker". His character and his personality, both burnished in a Spanish-French-Arab crucible, gave him a special, captivating touch that generated complicity and made those around him feel like "his people". During his work as the Department Head at the Hospital Torrecárdenas, he encouraged work and determination, the recognition of a job well done, and always had time to be a Doctor, with capital letters. He was convinced that, in the words of the philosopher Emilio Lledó, "There is no knowledge without wisdom."

Throughout all these years, he dedicated his life and soul to Surgery, his Surgery. He endured and enjoyed both patients and people. He was the surgical root of many excellent surgeons and also the drive behind everyone who, inexperienced and eager to learn Surgery (with capital letters), came to his Department. As a boss and a master, he was generous, not only as a teacher but also, perhaps more importantly, in letting others learn. He taught us to *think* Surgery logically and honestly, firmly and with resolution, with a scientific basis yet without academicism. He transmitted *cultured* Surgery, without empty eruditions. And, most importantly, he always did so with open and sincere humility.

On a personal level, his involvement was honest and direct, fully implicating himself in the lives of those whom he always considered "his people". He was a singular conversationalist: lucid and perceptive, with brilliant side-notes, almost to the point of being excessive, and—as his son, Dr. Ricardo Belda Lozano, stated—full of a sort of mysterious magnetism. He liked to talk about everything, about Surgery and about People, about the superficial and the deep, always providing the

conversation with his zing of intelligent, easy-going sense of humor, leaving a pleasant, witty and wise aftertaste of a dialogue that would always be remembered. Likewise, he will always be remembered in endearing memories of nights, days and difficult surgeries shared, followed by that exhausting peace, which is so “surgical”.

According to a French proverb, *Vivre, c’est se souvenir* — “To live is to remember”. Our hope remains in his memory and in the meaning that his life will have for all of us. In death, there is no greater dignity than the life that preceded it.

May his memory serve as a blessing.

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