



# Gastroenterología y Hepatología

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## IN MEMORIAM

### ‘‘In Memoriam’’ Ricardo Sáinz Samitier<sup>☆</sup>



On 24 April, Professor Ricardo Sáinz Samitier passed away in Zaragoza. His death took place a day after San Jorge's day. San Jorge (Saint George) is the patron saint of Aragon, the region that Ricardo was so proud of. Aragon, on the other hand, owes Ricardo a lifetime dedicated to the practice of medicine and its teaching at the Universidad de Zaragoza [University of Zaragoza], which has borne fruit few people are able to achieve.

In 1967, Ricardo Sáinz Samitier obtained a bachelor's degree in medicine and surgery from the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela [University of Santiago de Compostela]. From there he moved to Barcelona where, seven years later,

he obtained a degree in the specialism of gastroenterology from the official school of gastrointestinal disorders at the Hospital de la Santa Cruz y San Pablo [Santa Cruz and San Pablo Hospital], under the guidance of Professor Francisco Vilardell, a person whom Ricardo always admired and respected. He later went to Paris where he worked as a foreign medical assistant at various Parisian hospitals. There he joined the Gastroenterology Department of Hospital Bichat where he carried out research work on gastric motility and worked on his doctoral thesis.

His subsequent movements took him back to Zaragoza, specifically to the School of General Pathology, where he worked with Professor Gabriel Guillén, and to the recently inaugurated Hospital Clínico Universitario [University Clinical Hospital] where he joined the Gastroenterology Department. It was then that, as a third year medical student, I met, without knowing it, the person who years later would become my boss, my teacher and my friend. I was attending for the first time, in training, a very crowded clinical session at the School of General Pathology. Of everything that happened in that session, I was surprised by the participation of one person in the discussion of the case. It seemed to me that what that person said was the cleverest and most sensible thing I had heard throughout the whole session. That person was Ricardo, although I didn't even know who he was then, nor did I remember his name, but I did remember his face.

A couple of years later, fate led me to enrol as an honorary intern student at the School of Medical Pathology B where I was assigned to the Gastroenterology Department of the Hospital Clínico Universitario with Ricardo. My professional life was no longer separated from that of Ricardo Sáinz. The fundamental reason is that Ricardo had a tremendous power of attraction given his people skills, his kindness, his training as a specialist, which clearly stood out from the rest, and above all his humanity that made even the

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youngest student feel comfortable with him. This experience that I describe is probably the same one that made people like Fernando Gomollón, Miguel Montoro, Eduardo Bajador, Julio Ducons and many others train with him. We chose to be gastroenterology specialists and we followed in his wake, as he universally made his mark not only in Aragon but also nationally and internationally within our speciality.

Over the 30 years that Ricardo was Head of Gastroenterology at the Hospital Clínico, the department progressively grew into one of the best in the country and laid the foundation for what it is now. In this sense, I want to highlight Ricardo's commitment to research within hospital services. The research situation in most of the hospitals in Spain during those years was not only tremendously deficient, but I would even dare to say that it was frowned upon by management and even by part of the medical personnel. Not only did Ricardo encourage us to do research, but he defended us in all instances and protected us from external pressure. The fruits obviously came later, but they did come, and for years our department has been on a par with the best departments in the country. Likewise, Ricardo instilled in us the need to get out of the local area, an experience that some of us have followed and which, like for him, has served to broaden our horizons, our network of contacts and, ultimately, the quality of our professional activity. One of Ricardo's "weaknesses" was always the residents, whom he pampered and looked after like a father, not only caring for their professional well-being but also for their personal well-being.

Another of the facets in which Ricardo Sáinz stood out and left his mark was in the more strictly university sphere. For many years, he taught at the University, first as a lecturer, then as a tenured professor and finally as Professor of Medicine. Ricardo was highly appreciated by the medical students, with whom he exercised and displayed his qualities as an extraordinary teacher. His kindness, his respect for the students and at the same time his closeness to them meant he always obtained the best marks awarded to the teachers by the students. Ricardo was much loved by the rest of the professors of the faculty and the University of

Zaragoza and it couldn't be otherwise. He collaborated and worked hard with many of them, always behaving like a gentleman, even in complicated situations that inevitably come about over the course of a long career. Ricardo was also a loyal and grateful person. As a result, he did not forget his teacher, Profesor Vilardell, who he promoted as "Honoris Causa" Professor by the Universidad de Zaragoza.

A final aspect to highlight has to do with the Asociación Española de Gastroenterología (AEG) [Spanish Association of Gastroenterology]. Ricardo, as an influential person in the field of our speciality at the time the AEG was born, together with people of stature such as Gonzalo Miño, Julio Ponce, José María Piqué and Miguel Pérez Mateo, among others, was decisive in its genesis and development. Ricardo wholeheartedly supported the project from its inception, as the AEG reflected his idea of the speciality. Later, he continued to present his scientific works at the AEG congresses and attend them, year after year, until his retirement. His determination drove many other gastroenterologists in the country who viewed the project with some reluctance. The AEG recognised his work by awarding him distinction for his career and contribution to the Association, together with Julio Ponce and José María Piqué at the XX Meeting of the Association in 2017.

I do not want to end this text in memory of Ricardo without pointing out that everything that I have just described about him on a professional level is dwarfed when we talk about Ricardo in his family environment. Luisa, his wife, and his children Jorge, Juan and Ana, were his weakness and his face glowed when he spoke of them. This is his most personal and intimate realm, and as such I only wish to put it on record to complete Ricardo's profile as a person of integrity in all areas of life.

Angel Lanás Arbeloa  
*Servicio de Aparato Digestivo, Hospital Clínico  
 Universitario Lozano Blesa, Universidad de Zaragoza,  
 Zaragoza, Spain*  
 E-mail address: [alanas@unizar.es](mailto:alanas@unizar.es)