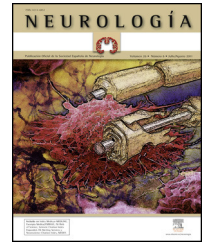




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IN MEMORIAM

Javier Urcola Echeverría (1937–2014)[☆]



Dr Javier Urcola was head of the neurology department at Hospital Provincial de Guipúzcoa, in San Sebastián, Spain, from 1976 to 2000. This cultivated, hard-working, and honest man dedicated 50 years of his life to treating thousands of neurological patients before succumbing to complications of kidney disease in February 2014.

Javier Urcola married Mari Carmen Carrera Goñi in 1965, and they had 5 children. In addition to my professional relationship and friendship with Javier, we shared family ties since my wife and his are sisters.

I met him in 1968 while I was studying medicine in Pamplona. At that time he was already a doctor in a clinic in San Sebastián, where he treated a great number of neurological patients. Javier had earned his medical degree in Zaragoza. In July 1961 he began working as an intern at Hospital Psiquiátrico de San Sebastián, then under the

direction of Dr Luis Martín Santos. Javier was fascinated by the personality and literary works of Luis, whose untimely death in a car accident in 1964 left his department with a sense of utter desolation. This event would orient Javier's professional career toward neurology and neurophysiology. Neurology in Spain was still an emerging specialty at that time, and very few hospitals boasted a neurology department. Acquiring training in this field was a difficult process requiring initiative, interest, and hard work.

Javier began his career as a neurologist in the neurophysiology department at Residencia Sanitaria Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu, where he was essentially responsible for electroencephalographic studies. Beginning in 1971, he developed a close relationship with Dr Martínez Lage, head of the neurology department at Clínica Universitaria in Pamplona, where my wife and I completed our residency. In 1973 he was made head of the neurophysiology department at Residencia Sanitaria Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu. He requested a leave of absence from that position 3 years after that in order to practice clinical neurology, and later transferred to Hospital Provincial de Guipúzcoa, where he would head the neurology department until his retirement in 2000. He subsequently continued treating patients at Policlínica Guipúzcoa until his terrible disease put an end to his professional activity. His understanding of psychiatry and neurophysiology and his vast store of general knowledge helped him comprehend and treat his patients.

As I write these lines, the memories of our many shared experiences come to my mind. I remember that in the 1970s, we often went fishing or walking in the mountains with his close friend Luis Pedro Peña Santiago, a writer with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Basque history, geography, and ethnography. With a tinge of embarrassment, I confess feeling inferior to both of them: they were so well-versed in history and geography, and in Romanesque and Basque folk art, including *argizaiolas* (a type of candle holder traditionally placed in Basque family tombs), funerary steles, and the evolution and influence of *caseríos* or traditional farmhouses

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in the history of the Basque Country. Javier spent the last years of his life researching the Way of Saint James in the Basque Country with his wife, and they made some important contributions. In his final months, his reading material revolved around Navarre. He displayed a strong sense of Basque identity and was active in the Basque intellectual community. The sea was another of his passions, and he kept a small boat for fishing for many years. He had a close relationship with the *arrantzales* (fishermen) in Fuenterrabía, where he spent many of his weekends and holidays.

Javier had been a member of the Spanish Society of Neurology (SEN) since 1965 and of the Basque Society of Neurology since it was founded in 1988. A frequent attendee of the SEN's annual meetings in Barcelona since 1967, he was also vice-president of the organisational committee for the Congress of Neurology we held in San Sebastián in 1984. In March 2007, Javier was honoured at the 28th Meeting of the Basque Society of Neurology when Dr Javier Olascoaga gave a magnificent presentation of Dr Urcola's career and merits. The president of the Basque Society of Neurology, Dr Juan José Zarranz, always maintained a good relationship with

Javier. Javier was also a member of the Royal Basque Society of the Friends of the Country, and journalist and writer Álvaro Bermejo described him as 'an enlightened neurologist'. A great conversationalist on any subject, he might further be described as a giver of good advice who was opposed to dogmas, an untidy man endowed with a serene yet lively mind, and a libertarian and sceptic known to be critical and sarcastic.

I hope these lines will help younger generations of neurologists understand Javier's accomplishments, as well as the difficulties of studying neurology in Spain 50 years ago, and the importance of developing a taste for culture in a wider sense.

The neurological community and Javier's friends deeply regret his loss and will always remember his engaging conversations.

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