

Dear Sir,

I'm writing this letter with the intention of clearing up a misunderstanding concerning some of the statements made by Dr. Forriol, in relation with an observation he made about my father, Dr. José Luis Mendoza Fernández, in the «Our Classics» section of the Journal, which contains one of his works, entitled «Considerations and Experiences in Bone Distraction. Mathematical Calculus in the Reduction of Fractures» (*Revista de Ortopedia y Traumatología*, 5/2006), which was first discussed in July 1949 at the Orthopedic Conference organized by the SECOT, in Bilbao.

In the first place, although Dr. Forriol asserts that Dr. Mendoza participated in the Blue Division, where he possibly came across Dr. Ilizarov's works, in which he allegedly found inspiration to create his own system, I must say that all this is not true.

In chapter one, («History of Orthopedic and Trauma Surgery in Spain», p.12) of «The History of SECOT», published by the Society in the year 2002 through STM Editores S.A., there is a biography of my father and of Drs. Cabot, Álvaro López and Palazzi —other eminent trauma surgeons of the 20th century— which is quite accurate, and which clearly expresses that it was six years prior to Ilizarov's invention that my father invented a bone distraction splint, which constituted the first circular external fixation system to be known. This testimony shows that my father could not have plagiarized Ilizarov's system, due to the fact that he himself had invented it several years before.

The information in the biography proves that the development of external fixation was not my father's only research work, since he was also the first to set up a geometric representation of the three natural planes and of the two mathematical planes that subsequently came to be used to represent the mechanical functioning of the hip, in his work «Hip Biomechanics», presented in Lisbon, in 1956. Be-

tween that year and 1958, he published other works, such as «The fracture of Bone Grafts in the Spine» and «The treatment of Flat Feet in Rural Areas», among others.

It must also be clearly stated that my father did not serve in the Blue Division, therefore he could never have known Dr. Ilizarov's work. What is more, it has been reported at several meetings in which the issue was discussed that, on the contrary, it was likely that Dr. Ilizarov had read the work developed by my father six years before. It is widely known that it was difficult in western countries to obtain information published beyond the now extinct Iron Curtain; on the other hand, for those in Eastern Europe it was possible to obtain the information published in the rest of the world.

Being his son and working in the same field, I can testify that my father developed his work without any help other than that of an engineer, Mr. Bouza, and an expert blacksmith, and certainly by reading an ample bibliography, most of which is still in my possession.

As he had only one model available, he transferred the results of his experimental research on sheep to his work on human beings, with the ensuing difficulties (figures 1 and 2 show photographs taken in October 1952). This problem was aggravated by the fact that neither his colleagues nor the surgical industry afforded him their support, a situation which led to the temporary suspension of the system.

The fact that, in the year 1956, he was designated Head of Department at the Manuel Lois Hospital in Huelva, and that, in that same year, Dr. Azcárate Prieto began collaborating with him signal the initiation of a second phase of experimentation starting in the year 1962, that is to say, long before the arrival of Dr. Ilizarov on the scene.

Later, in the year 1973, Dr. Azcárate took up this post, which was vacant due to the fact that my father had fallen ill. In this second phase they worked on several cases of open tibial fractures as well as on infected pseudoarthroses,

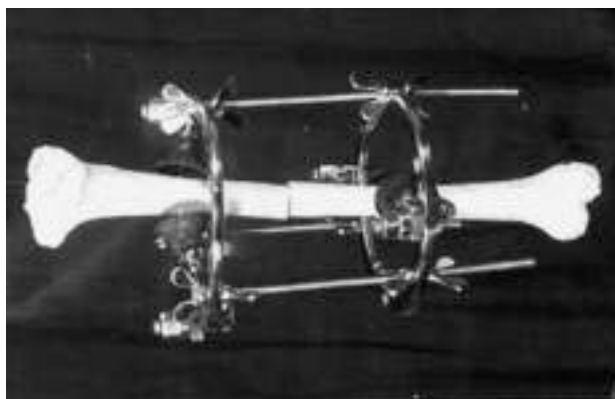


Figure 1. Photograph taken in 1952. We can see the fixation system designed by Dr. Mendoza Fernández on one of his patients.



Figure 2. Photograph also taken in 1952. We can see one of the patients of Dr. Mendoza Fernández with the fixation system designed by him.

obtaining highly satisfactory results, which they presented at several meetings but did not publish.

In spite of these positive results, as Dr. Forriol states, with the advent of other osteosynthesis methods and image amplifiers to daily practice, my father's system was progressively given up. Following Dr Ilizarov's visit to Spain, the external circular fixation method became a novel system and was widely divulged.

There was an imitation model produced by Dr. Vaquero for Dr. Ilizarov, and it was Dr. Azcárate who presented photocopies of the Dr. Mendoza's work at various seminars, meetings and courses on the topic, and who expounded on the originality and precocity of the invention. In this respect, Dr. Azcárate once told me an anecdote: At a course on bone lengthening in Rome, he presented my father's work to Dr. Monticelli, the teacher of the course. Dr. Monticelli was not acquainted with the work, and a long discussion ensued, after which Dr. Monticelli was deeply convinced of its worth. From then on, he mentioned the work in every meeting, course and publication in which he took part.

In any case, this work has become a classic in seminars and conferences on the issue and it has been mentioned by various authors, such as Drs. Lazo, Cañadell, Palacios Carvajal and Vaquero, all of them colleagues who, besides acknowledging the benefits and originality of the system,

were very good friends of my father's. I also wish to thank Dr. Forriol for the praise he bestows on it twice in his observations.

However, I cannot agree with the affirmation, with which Dr. Monticelli agrees, that the system made no progress beyond its initial stage, since it was first tested in sheep and subsequently in humans, in two phases: the first in Játiva and the second beginning in 1962, as I explained above. Hence, the system rendered satisfactory results, but it fell into disuse because of the indifference of the medical-surgical industry and of several colleagues until it was eventually given up.

I must emphasize the appreciation towards my father expressed by many scientific societies and I must thank Dr. Jorda for having acknowledged him as one of the few scientists of the 20th century worthy of being mentioned in the «History of the SECOT». I also wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Azcárate, without whom this letter would not have been written, for the many years he worked together with my father, during which they were associated in a mutual feeling of affection, respect and admiration.

With the hopeful expectation that this letter will be published, I send you my most affectionate greetings,

J.L. Mendoza Castells