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IN MEMORIAM

Javier Ruiz Ojeda[☆]

Dear Javi, we at the neurology department at Hospital de Galdakao, Vizcaya, wanted to dedicate this message to you.

Our beloved colleague and friend Javi (Javier Ruiz Ojeda) left us suddenly, on 1 December 2015, with no time to say goodbye. He was in Madrid, having travelled to Barajas Airport to welcome home his eldest son, who had been studying in Canada. He was accompanied by his loved ones: his wife Amaya and his two younger children.

The news left us in shock; Amaya quickly informed us that her husband was in a hospital in Madrid in critical condition. For the following 48 h, we remained glued to the minute-by-minute account, hoping against hope, until at last he was gone.

Javi was a central figure in Hospital de Galdakao's neurology department. He first arrived as a temporary hire in 1996; he was the fifth member of the current team to join the service. He had completed his neurology residency at Hospital de Cruces and had graduated from medical school at the University of the Basque Country. Javi soon demonstrated his extensive professional training in neurology, and his eagerness to work; later on, we were also to get to know him as an exceptional human being. Since he only had a temporary contract at the hospital in those years, we saw him launch what would become his well-known neurology clinic in the Bilbao city centre. While his path was not smooth at first, in just a short time he became a popular neurologist with a burgeoning practice.

Despite his family commitments, work at the hospital, and management of his private clinic, Javi's knowledge of

neurological disease remained completely up-to-date, and we asked ourselves when he found the time to study. He worked on several research projects with his colleagues at the school of medicine, first in the pharmacology department, and later in the genetics department for his studies on Huntington disease.

We shared our workday experiences with Javi – patients, outpatient consultations, clinical sessions, congresses, and courses – but we also had the privilege of sharing parts of his private life. Javi became a fully-fledged member of the neurology team, after which we witnessed another milestone: the birth of his three children. Although his first-born took his time, everything was easier after that. Once Javi was raising a family, he cut back his hours to part time in order to make his hospital work compatible with his family obligations and managing his private clinic. We shared a good laugh when he told of his summertime adventures of trying to reach the coves of Menorca with three kids in tow and too much gear. He also laughed with us at a resident's farewell party, as you can see in the photo: this is how we wanted to remember him, enjoying our company. We also were by his side at more challenging times, such as when illness struck his family.

Despite only working at the hospital part time, Javi was, without a doubt, the most popular neurologist among us. As someone said once, he was the hospital's 'general neurologist'. He saw patients from every department and unit in the hospital, and he treated their family members in his clinic in Bilbao. And 'treated' is the right word; time spent with

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Javi was indeed a special treat. Many people outside of his family, and many of his patients, have reminded us lately that Javi was unable to say 'no' to anyone. And what was even more impressive is that he never lost his good humour. His telephone invariably began ringing at eight o'clock in the morning – possibly on weekends as well – but we were the only ones to raise an eyebrow. The only advice we ever gave him was to establish some boundaries, but he never did. He tried to help all comers, and not just as a doctor. He was committed to training new generations of neurologists, made the neurology department a more vibrant place, and was genuinely concerned about our residents. It was with them in mind that he organised morning sessions known as the 'zebra workshops' for diagnosing rare cases, most of which came from his clinic since he saw so many patients. What we failed to realise at the time is that the rarest 'zebra' of all was Javi himself: hard to find, unique, peerless, incredible.

The beautiful service held at Bilbao's Santiago Cathedral was attended by many, many people, including grateful patients, university classmates, colleagues from Hospital de Cruces and Hospital de Basurto, and all of us, including past residents and neurologists now working in other regions. Not only the doctors and colleagues who accompanied him on his rounds, but also hospital workers of all types and levels. The attendance spoke volumes.

Farewell Javi, our dearest colleague, who will always be part of our team. *Agur.*



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