

## Science and art in Argentine medicine, and the multiple problems in relation to economy and technology

History has demonstrated that, in Argentina, early scientific investigations in medicine started in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Very few physicians were working in this field, who gradually started conducting some research.

Undoubtedly, a doctor who was always intensively working towards medicine was Bernardo Houssay, M.D., who in 1910 started conducting studies on the pituitary gland. He then increased his research base and also took in other physicians who were able to learn from him and who, thanks to him, became very relevant. That period marked the first steps of research, thus allowing the development of scientific clinical research, and the pituitary gland subject would turn into the study of endocrinology.

Some years later, in the 1930s, Houssay had already developed several original investigations, similar to the few studies being carried out in the USA and Europe.

Then, in 1932, he sought the collaboration of cardiologists interested in physiology and was thus able to work with Braun Menéndez, M.D., an excellent physician throughout. Oscar Orías, M.D., was also a member of Houssay's school and this was the initiation of clinical research in the field of cardiology.

This way, there were increasingly more studies and Houssay was able to maintain his stance on science, art, and ethics. He worked fervently and also faced several problems, such as getting expelled from the School of Medicine in 1943 due to political reasons. In 1945, he was able to go back, but only for a year. In 1947, he received the very well-deserved Nobel Prize in Medicine, but again had problems for political reasons. During such unfavorable times, Houssay was already the first Latin American to win a Nobel Prize in Medicine and was recognized across the region.

He was able to go back to the School of Medicine after Perón was overthrown in 1955. He set out to turn science into an institution and reached his goal in 1958 with the creation of the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (*Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas*, CONICET).

Luis Leloir, M.D., was an excellent person who worked intensively for many years in several countries and was an outstanding disciple of Houssay. In 1960, Leloir became a member of

the National Academy of Sciences of the United States. In 1967, he received the Horwitz Prize from the University of Columbia, New York, and in 1969 he became a honorary member of the United Kingdom Biochemical Society.

Among various other activities, Leloir received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry (Science and Research) in 1970. He then became Chair of the Association for the Advancement of Science of Universidad de Buenos Aires, and, in 1971, was designated Honorary Chair of CONICET.

César Milstein, M.D., was the last Argentine to receive the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1984, which was undoubtedly a very well-deserved award for his investigations about monoclonal antibodies, a very relevant study. Milstein studied at Universidad de Buenos Aires and graduated from the School of Exact and Natural Sciences. He had a PhD in Chemistry and then received a grant from the University of Cambridge in England, where he worked for many years conducting several investigations.

Now, first I would like to point out what physicians have done since the time when they started devoting less and less time to patients. This became even more notable after 1960, and increased rapidly; physicians gradually started losing knowledge, which is the most critical asset they should have. However, science in the field of medicine has seen several advances, which have been beneficial but, at the same time, health care providers started to work not in the best interest of patients and the parents of newborn infants and children.

The results inadequately obtained by physicians were caused by the use of technical resources, which were managed by economy and, therefore, had to meet certain objectives to be reasonable. But some physicians were not, and they got more and more involved in technological medicine, which turned into a wild race.

One of the most serious problems is that medicine is losing art, which should always be present so that the actions of all physicians are adequate. Until 60 years ago, art in medicine coexisted with scientific medicine, and this allowed us greater effectiveness and also greater responsibility. The medical pendulum tilted towards technology and this may entail the risk of leaving altruism aside, which is a critical and

intrinsic attitude to be a good physician and maintain a vocation at all times.

Medicine has existed for many centuries and, since it is a humanistic activity, it coexists with art since its beginning and is therefore exempt from obsolescence, which is typical of inadequate innovations. In addition, art is next to ethics and both should last forever.

Unfortunately, since 1950, medicine lost its actions and started acting as if it were at the origin of economy, thus reducing its equity.

Twenty years ago, an editorial published in *The Lancet*, an English journal, was titled *Just how tainted has medicine become?*

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