

Doctor Marcelino Mendieta Romero. Un hombre de reto y superación Doctor Marcelino Mendieta Romero. A man of challenge and self-improvement

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RESUMEN

Se realiza una síntesis biográfica del Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero, médico internista, dedicado a la Terapia Intensiva en adultos, fundador de esta Unidad en el Hospital Docente, Aleida Fernández Chardiet. El objetivo de este artículo, es dar a conocer la trayectoria de un médico que por su tenacidad y carácter, sirve de ejemplo a las nuevas generaciones. Su vida se centra en la lucha contra la pobreza, las necesidades económicas, los prejuicios y el racismo. Médico internacionalista con reconocimiento por su actitud en la prestación de servicios. Toda su vida se mantiene en la superación, participa en congresos y eventos nacionales y foráneos. Se destaca en el ámbito religioso y cultural. El doctor, ejerce su profesión hasta que su vida se ve truncada por una penosa enfermedad. Pasa a la eternidad como un hombre lleno de amor y gloria.

Palabras clave: hombre de lucha, superación, sacrificio, médico internista, humildad, trayectoria profesional

Descriptores: médico; medicina interna; humanismo; religión; cultura; respeto

ABSTRACT

A biographical synthesis of Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero is carried out. He was an internist, dedicated to Intensive Care for adults, and founder of this Unit at the Aleida Fernández Chardiet Teaching Hospital. The objective of this article is to make known the career of a physician who, through his tenacity and character, serves as an example to new generations. His life is centered on the struggle against poverty, economic hardship, prejudice, and racism. He was an internationalist physician recognized for his attitude in the provision of services. Throughout his life he remained committed to self-improvement, participating in congresses and national and foreign events. He stood out in the religious and cultural spheres. The doctor practiced his profession until his life was cut short by a painful illness. He passed into eternity as a man full of love and glory.

Keywords: man of struggle, self-improvement, sacrifice, internist, humility, professional career

Descriptors: physicians; internal medicine; humanism; religion; culture; respect

INTRODUCTION

In the years between 1935 and 1940, Cuba suffered a negative impact on its economy, caused by the fall in sugar prices worldwide. This produced unemployment and an increase in the poverty gap. The dependence on the United States economy and the country's recovery in terms of economic stability was uneven and slow. The government was represented by Gerardo Machado y Morales; the country's social situation was characterized by political repression and corruption. This generated protests, disillusionment, and political instability.

In this social context, Marcelino Mendieta Romero was born in the city of Cienfuegos on August 6, 1938. He was the first of four siblings, in a humble family. Due to the economic situation and the adversities faced daily, they decided to move to the former province of Ciudad de La Habana, now La Habana province, in search of a different economic status. In this city, they lived in various places such as the Pocitos neighborhood, in Marianao and Guanabacoa. They accessed low-cost rentals due to their precarious conditions; they suffered eviction, extreme hunger, and infectious diseases.

When Marcelo, as he is affectionately called, turned eight years old, his mother Josefina Romero died from a tuberculosis infection. It was a painful event that occurred in the course of a massive hemoptysis; he was left traumatized and swore at the bedside of his deceased mother to become a doctor to help many poor people. From that moment on, he began working as a newspaper vendor, shoe shiner, and gardener, suffering abuse, swindling, hunger, and hopelessness.

The end of the Batista regime on January 1, 1959, is considered by Dr. Marcelino to be a time of opportunity and hope. In the months of February to March of that year, he received an unfortunate diagnosis: he was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis. The disease was advanced, with a fibrosed lung full of cavities; he had to opt for surgical treatment, and a total pneumonectomy of the left lung was performed. These were months of pain and anguish, but that never made him turn back, nor did it break his drive to study.

With an iron will, he began a daytime refresher course for fifth and sixth grade to complete primary school, while at the same time taking

another nighttime course to catch up on his studies in junior high school. It was a true feat that ended in success.

Immediately upon finishing, he took the academic entrance exams to enter the Vladimir Ilich Lenin School, in a national call with a rigorous selection process; after the entrance exams, he passed and was selected to pursue his Baccalaureate. The young man recalls that time as one of the most exciting moments of his life.

The objective of this article is to make known the career of a physician who serves as an example to other generations.

DEVELOPMENT

The Baccalaureate as a Challenge

The Baccalaureate (1963 to 1964) demanded great efforts; he devoted nighttime hours to study and distanced himself from his loved ones in order to master new and complex subjects. Although he found himself homeless and without monetary resources to support himself, every exam was a challenge. During rest hours, he took on extra, poorly paid work in order to support himself. Some religious institutions to which he belonged provided him with unconditional help. In an anecdote, he mentions the frequent visits of religious brothers belonging to the Abakuá organization, who came to evaluate his health and help with his basic needs.

In those years of dedication, he managed to successfully complete this stage, which allowed him to begin the only career for which he fought so hard: Medicine.

A Stage of Maximum Rigor and Discipline

In 1968, he began his studies at the Victoria de Girón Faculty of Medical Sciences, where discipline, the rigor of the professors, and the need to become a doctor contributed to forming an honest, dedicated, studious, and above all, humane man.

He quickly moved from the basic sciences area to the clinical area. At that moment, for the first time, he visited an internal medicine ward and was moved by the wisdom of the internists and the diversity of health problems that, in his view, could be solved through intensive study.

At that time, at the request of the Ministry of Public Health, he carried out healthcare services in the eastern provinces of Cuba, in rural areas. That mission, although complex, was of

great humanitarian value.

Upon graduating in 1974, he began the specialty of Internal Medicine. He had to interrupt it in his second year in order to carry out an internationalist mission in Ethiopia, Figure 1.



Fig. 1: Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero with a group of colleagues on the mission in Ethiopia

In that country, he took on the treatment of diseases uncommon in the Americas, which gave him great knowledge. He learned several dialects, which allowed him to communicate easily with the natives and gain the acceptance of the population. Even today, when recalling the anecdote, with tears in his eyes, of the day the mission ended, he has said that many Ethiopians from the town near the Addis Ababa Hospital had bowed to him in a genupectoral inclination, in an immense line. This produced in him a duality between the joy of returning to Cuba with his duty fulfilled and a deep sadness at withdrawing and leaving behind great health problems still unresolved in that country, Figure 2.



Fig. 2: Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero, in Gondar, Ethiopia, with a group of colleagues and natives

Upon returning to Cuba, he focused on completing his specialty at the General Calixto García Teaching Clinical-Surgical Hospital. After graduating as a specialist, he carried out his social service at the Aleida Fernández Chardiet Teaching Hospital in Güines, in what was then

La Habana province, now Mayabeque province. He practiced as a clinician in the Internal Medicine wards and actively participated in the training of internists, technicians, and nursing graduates; but his most important work was contributing to improving the health status of many patients who still mention him as a humane and exceptional doctor.

Together with Professor Dr. Ramón Moreira Cabrera, he founded the Intensive Care Service of this hospital, a place where he worked until his last working days. During his extensive professional life, the doctor participated in various national and international courses, as well as congresses and scientific events. He published several articles in national journals.

Outstanding Scientific Activity

Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero participated in more than 10 international congresses held at the Palace of Conventions in Cuba, representing the specialty of Internal Medicine. Among his works, the following stand out:

- Most frequent parasites in the population of Güines.
- Pancreatitis associated with giardiasis in a community of the Luis Li Triguient polyclinic.
- Acute viral hepatitis in the population of Güines and San Nicolás de Bari.
- Application of Streptokinase in Comprehensive Diagnostic Centers of Venezuela.
- Use of laser therapy in chronic cervicitis, published in the *Medimay* journal,^(1,2) among other topics.

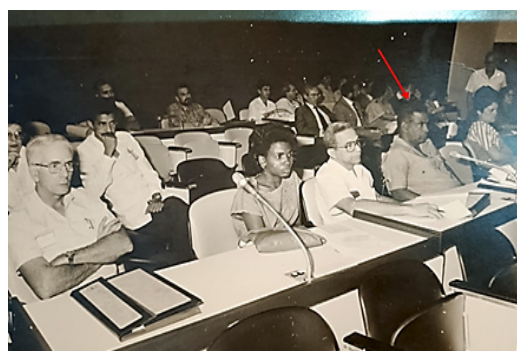


Fig. 3: Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero, at the International Congress of Medicine

He participated in several institutional scientific events and completed more than 20 scientific conferences between 1987 and 1995. He completed a Diploma in Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine at the Miguel Enríquez Teaching Hospital, which allowed him to dedicate himself to this specialty during the last years of his life. As a professional, he remained active

and up to date; examples of this are the various training courses he received at the Ministry of Public Health on topics such as: mechanical ventilation, sepsis management, management of asthmatic status, and therapeutic updates in arterial hypertension.

Relationship with Religious Institutions and Organizations

Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero joined the secret Abakuá organization at a young age, at the temple Eron Entati Ibiono, located in the Guanabacoa municipality, in the Cruz Verde neighborhood. The men who belonged to that brotherhood at that time were devoid of material wealth, but the concept of brotherhood, honesty, and justice was present.

He learned all the rituals and Bricamo dialects of the religion. For many, he was a wise man in this field and a deep connoisseur of the rules of this organization. He gave theoretical lectures related to the subject in different Lodges across the country, an organization to which he belonged until his death. He founded a Palo Monte house, where he not only dedicated himself to religious matters but also taught the initiates. He maintained an ethic of respect and achieved harmony between science and religion.

At every stage of his life, he overcame and conquered prejudices and racial accusations; they never managed to stop the man whose only wealth was love and his knowledge. Dr. Marcelino Mendieta Romero dedicated more than 40 years of work to his profession; it was only interrupted by the suffering of a painful illness that took his life, while he was still full of projects and goals.

At an event held at the Masonic Lodge of Güines to celebrate Medicine Day, he spoke words that demonstrate the humility that characterized him, and his words are quoted: "...I never thought that the story of my life would interest anyone", and a few days later he died from the illness he suffered from. This distinguished physician leaves as a legacy the love for his patients, friends, and family, and his example of struggle, self-improvement, and dedication.

Authorship Contribution.

Participation according of the order agreed upon by each of the authors of this work.

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He passes into eternity as a man full of love and glory.

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