

In Memoriam

Professor Carlos Garcia



It was with great sadness and a deep sense of loss that the large “family” of friends, colleagues and students of Professor Carlos Garcia received the news of his death, on 17 January 2004. He was a true pioneer in clinical research into dementia, especially Alzheimer’s disease, in Portugal.

Professor Carlos Garcia was born in Lisbon in May 1936. He studied Medicine at the University of Lisbon, where he graduated in 1964. He started practising at Lisbon’s Civil Hospitals in 1965, and did his training in Neurology at the Hospital de Santa Maria. This was the start of an achieving career as a neurologist for a man who was endowed with a fine clinical sense, and who treated others, especially patients, with unfailing respect. His innovative spirit and energy were first illustrated by his contribution to the organization of the dementia clinic at Hospital de Santa Maria in Lisbon.

He started a teaching career at the University of Lisbon in 1976, driven by scientific curiosity, allied with a vast and rich experience in Clinical Neurology. His commitment to science is best exemplified by his life-long fostering to help younger neurologists, psychia-

trists and psychologists in his department, which was an exceptional training unit, with himself as an ever-present mentor.

Crucial to his attitude as a clinical researcher was the relationship he forged with Dr John Blass, during the period he spent at the Dementia Research Service of New York Hospital – Cornell Medical School. On his return to Portugal he devoted himself to clinical research into dementia, devising a battery of neuropsychological assessment tests that are now used in the evaluation of dementia by other clinics in the country.

His Ph.D. thesis, entitled *Doença de Alzheimer, problemas de diagnóstico clínico* (Alzheimer’s Disease, problems of clinical diagnosis), which was submitted to the University of Lisbon in 1985, is an example of his dedication to the clinical investigation of dementias. Over the next 18 years of his scientific and medical career, Professor Carlos Garcia continued to prove his insatiable curiosity as a scientist, and talents as a clinician, always driven by his patients’ welfare.

The multi-disciplinary approach to dementia, he established in his group, has an enlightening and decisive influence on the way this disorder is managed in Portugal.

In 1986 he founded the Study Group on Cerebral Aging and Dementia, which grew to currently become an independent group of national experts, devoted to the studies of the aging process and aging-related disorders.

His commitment to the study of Alzheimer’s disease extended beyond the frontiers of the scientific and educational aspects, since he was also concerned with supporting patients and their families. He founded the Portuguese Association of Friends and Relatives of Alzheimer’s Patients, in 1988. His capacity to support his fellow was a defining feature of his character, of his generosity as a man.

Professor Garcia was a very lucid man. Sometimes his reasoning appeared confusing, and only later would one realize the important point he was trying to make, that we could not grasp at once. Being lucid, he

was necessarily skeptical about the present possibilities of medicine. Certainly the area he was devoted to, Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, constantly reminded him of these limitations. Even though, he was always a constructive, compassionate, positive skeptic. One of the most impressive traces of his personality was the absolute respect he felt for others, be it a renowned colleague, a student, or a humble patient. Professor Garcia never imposed, he suggested. All this made Professor Garcia a kind, rigorous and friendly man.

One of the recurrent topics of discussion in the group was whether everyone will be demented provided one lives long enough. Professor Garcia believed that cognitive decline associated with ageing is perhaps postponable or minimized, but inevitable. I do not know whether he was concerned or not about this pos-

sibility concerning his own ageing. But remarkably, during the course of the dramatic disease and all the suffering he had, his mental faculties were accurate and bright. The threat of cognitive deterioration, which he fought against all his life, could not overcome him.

Professor Carlos Garcia was a warm-hearted gentle man with a fine sense of humour. His death is a great loss, not only for his family, but for all those clinicians and researchers actively interested in the study of dementia. We all learned so much from him. Thank you, Carlos, for the privilege of knowing you and sharing your friendship.

May you rest in peace.

Catarina Resende Oliveira and
Alexandre de Mendonça