

In memoriam

Alfonso Castro Beiras. In Loving Memory of an Irreplaceable Friend

Alfonso Castro Beiras. En recuerdo de un amigo único



We met Alfonso over 20 or 30 years ago and, despite the time gone by, we are happy to say that we did not know him, because he kept on surprising us, delighting us and, above all, getting us and himself excited about any and every initiative he undertook. And the spectrum is broad: clinical medicine, epidemiology, research, new technologies, communications— even clinical management! He would dive into all of these disciplines with generosity and success; always the most enthusiastic of all.

We will not go into his enormous successes in all these fields and in others, because they are well known. But in this remembrance, we would like to reflect on the reasons for that success and on why he had such an enormous impact on Spanish health care and, above all, on the people around him.

Alfonso was generous with other people's shortcomings and strict with his own. Not the physical limitations although, in his case, his spondylitis, mitigated by his obstinacy and tenacity, never kept him from embarking on activities designed for other anatomies; we refer, rather, to other people's mental limitations: he had a profound knowledge of the human soul. He was able to detect limitations, to relate to them and, with his attitude, his expression, and his words, to temper them and make the most of each person's aptitudes. He was capable of pushing you gently and constantly to take on tasks that you felt you were unable to handle, and could get you to enjoy them! In short, he believed more in everybody else than everybody else believed in themselves. Perhaps, if we were to look for a fault, for all his generosity, there was one human shortcoming with which he never attempted to empathize, and that quality was meanness. In a world proud of jumping over obstacles, he preferred to go around them, convince everyone of the beauties of the roundabout route, and avoid hurting anyone unnecessarily along the way. He was, therefore, an

example of intelligence: on the one hand, in terms of his intellectual capacity—which enabled him not only to have a deep knowledge of scientific medicine, but also to take advantage of the learnings of other disciplines to broaden his understanding of the world and help others (he was very fond of history and the lives of notable individuals)—and on the other hand, and especially, in the emotional sphere. Mindfulness, emotional intelligence, coaching and many other gerunds were innate in him. Years later, others gave them names.

With this wealth of experience and wisdom, it was easy for him to become what he was: Alfonso was a superb healer. He would have been that in any case, even if cardiology, with which we all identify him, had not undergone these recent years of enormous scientific development, in which he was able to make himself a maestro. He joked that his goal was to be capable of healing by the laying on of hands. Although he was too modest to accept the fact, he had achieved that goal some time ago, and not with the laying on of hands, but with his words and understanding. So much so, that it wasn't necessary to be ill to benefit from this: he consoled, alleviated and comforted countless people, generously and selflessly, both in medical questions and in matters concerning their routine daily activities, making no distinction among these persons on the basis of their origin.

Now, Alfonso has died. A disease took him away. Not the one that we thought would take him from us; another, sadder ailment, but a disease, as well. When someone who is loved disappears, immediate solace is impossible. Time, as he himself taught, will provide us with the necessary perspective to appreciate the enormous richness of his life as he himself enjoyed it and as it touched the lives of those of us who could enjoy it with him: he lived more than 70 years, gave much more to society than most of us will ever give, he loved and was loved and, with Carmen, delighted in and helped in raising the two marvelous women that his daughters have become. And he had grandchildren, who brightened up his last few years. And friends, many friends. We have had the immense fortune to be included among them and take pleasure in his friendship. In short, he lived his life to the fullest.

Time, as we said, will enable us to remember him, with a trace of a smile on our faces and with all the affection that he earned.

Until then, Alfonso, rest awhile. You deserve to.

Marisa Crespo-Leiro^a and Javier Muñiz^b

^a*Servicio de Cardiología, Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de A Coruña, A Coruña, Spain*

^b*Instituto Universitario de Ciencias de la Salud e Instituto de Investigación Biomédica de A Coruña (INIBIC), Universidad de A Coruña, A Coruña, Spain*