

## In memoriam

## In Memory of an Exceptional Cardiologist and Colleague: Magda Heras i Fortuny (1953–2014)



This is the article I never wanted to write. Firstly, because it means that Dr. Magda Heras is no longer with us. Magda, the unflinching resident, the skilled cardiologist, the tireless departmental colleague, the lovable friend and advisor. Secondly, because one would like to find new words that could faithfully express the void that Magda has left among us, without resorting to the hackneyed phrases and overused expressions that now seem purely formulaic.

Magda was born in Terrassa, where she completed her general education in 1972. From 1972 to 1978, she was a brilliant medical student at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*. She started her residency in internal medicine at the *Hospital Mútua de Terrassa* in 1978 and her residency in cardiology at *Hospital Clínic de Barcelona* in 1982. After a brief spell as an attending physician at the hospital where she trained in Terrassa, she returned to *Hospital Clínic*, joining the cardiology department, where she would remain until her recent death. She was appointed first as an attending physician, then as section head, and finally—in 2005—as senior consultant, the highest rank at that center. During this time she held a 2-year fellowship (1987–1989) at the Mayo Clinic Arteriosclerosis and Thrombosis Laboratory in Rochester (Minnesota, United States), followed by other brief stays at that institution and at the Cardiovascular Biology Research Laboratory of Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. She achieved a doctorate in 1986, passing *apto cum laude*. Magda was essentially a clinical cardiologist, which—in my opinion—is the most difficult and needed subspecialty in cardiology. She was familiar with invasive and noninvasive techniques and had practiced them, which gave her a comprehensive view of the problems affecting her patients and allowed her to take sensible, well-balanced decisions. Unfortunately, the young cardiologists of today are more easily seduced by the brilliance of cardiological techniques than by the work of the clinical cardiologist, which is less dazzling but essential for good patient care. How I wish that Magda's example would propagate in coming generations!

Also worthy of mention are the other branches of her professional life: teaching and research. From the moment she joined *Hospital Clínic*, Magda was both an example and a mentor to generations of residents. Approachable, but also demanding where work was concerned, she served as an inspiration for many cardiologists who, now in positions of responsibility, deeply mourn her loss. In 2006 she achieved her dream of becoming a professor at the *Universidad de*

*Barcelona*. On her return from the Mayo Clinic, and struggling the best she could with the scant resources available at that time, she pioneered the creation of a basic research group in *Fundació Clínic* and in *IDIBAPS (Institut d'Investigacions Biomèdiques August Pi i Sunyer)*, and in 2003 became the director of the group. This research activity, both basic and clinical, resulted in the 50 grants she was awarded during her working life, her participation in 32 multicenter studies, the 21 prizes she was awarded (the most recent being that of the Acute Cardiovascular Care Association of the European Society of Cardiology [ESC] in 2013), and almost 200 articles published in peer-reviewed journals.

Magda's professional influence extended far beyond the cardiology department and hospital where she worked. Because of her unwavering enthusiasm and abilities, multiple societies and institutions—both in Spain and elsewhere—sought her out as a collaborator. Ever tireless, she was a frequent invited speaker—making more than 230 presentations—at a multitude of congresses and symposia of the Spanish Society of Cardiology, the Academy of Medical and Health Sciences of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, the ESC, The Chilean and Argentinian Societies of Cardiology, the American Heart Association, and the American College of Cardiology, among others. Her efforts to improve medical education and healthcare quality led her to sit on or preside over innumerable committees: the European Educational Programme in Cardiology, the ESC Task Force on Education Online, the ESC Task Force on MCQs and Professional Standards, the Committee for Practice Guidelines Task Force, the Advisory Committee of the Department of Translational Cardiovascular Research of the National Center for Cardiovascular Research (only her illness extinguished my own and Dr. Valentín Fuster's heartfelt desire for her to join our center), the ESC Accreditation Committee on Intensive and Acute Cardiac Care of the Working Group on Acute Cardiac Care, the ESC Working Group on Thrombosis and Vascular Biology, the Council on Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology of the American Heart Association, the ESC Working Group on Cardiovascular Pharmacology and Drug Therapy, and the National Agency for Assessment and Forecasting of the Ministry of Science and Technology. She was also president of the Ischemic Heart Disease Section of the Spanish Society of Cardiology. In all these committees, her dedication and meticulousness aroused the admiration of her colleagues.

Magda also served on the editorial boards of several journals. In 2009, she was named Editor-in-Chief of *Revista Española de Cardiología* and devoted much care and concern to this task until the very end of her life. As acknowledged by the president of the Spanish Society of Cardiology, in her hands the journal grew in international prestige, recently achieving an impact factor of 3.342. Magda knew how to assemble and lead a group of magnificent professionals, physicians, linguists, statisticians, and journalists, who helped her mobilize her most deeply-held personal goal: a high-quality, simultaneous bilingual edition, modernizing the journal's format and production processes, completely renovating the website, and launching a bilingual app for iPad. In short, she brought the journal into the 21st century.

A curriculum vitae will only tell us about a part of a person, not even the most important part. What matters is not what we do, but

how we do it, how we travel our own personal road to Ithaca. Magda achieved the wisdom Cavafy sang about, developing a personality full of surprising nuances and contrasts. Despite her fragile appearance, she had an inner strength that allowed her to face her most difficult moments, including her death, with extreme dignity. Serious at work, she nevertheless had a deep empathy and emotional intelligence that made her approachable to colleagues and patients. She exercised strong leadership and never tried to take advantage of her superiority to gratify her ego, instead putting her skills at the service of others. Her dedication to work was tireless but, surprisingly, she also had other passions: her family, sport, reading, and music. She fought relentlessly against injustice, except when she herself was the object; then, she was able to suffer nobly, always putting the common good before her own personal and professional interests.

Magda, your life and work, prematurely cut short, will not be forgotten. Your family, students, and friends learned too much from you for your example to fade. In the words of one of your favorite poets (Martí i Pol):

*En solitud, però no solitaris,  
reconduïm la vida, amb la certesa  
que cap esforç no cau en terra eixorca.  
Dia vindrà que algú beurà a mans plenes  
l'aigua de llum que brolli de les pedres  
d'aquest temps nou que ara esculpim nosaltres.*

*(In solitude, but not alone,  
we redirect our lives, certain that  
no effort will fall on barren soil.  
The day will come when others will cup their hands and  
drink the water of light that bursts from the stones  
of these new times we are now sculpting.)*

Beloved Magda, as the editor of the journal, you would require me to end with a summary that leaves the reader clear about the message of this obituary. It is almost impossible to do so. Therefore, I will borrow words again, this time from another poet (Ángel González), of which Marc, Anna, and all her family and friends will surely approve:

*If I were God,  
and knew the secret,  
I would make  
an exact copy of you.*

Farewell, my friend!

Ginés Sanz  
Madrid, Spain