National hospice for the insane and the Brazilian Neurology in the beginning of the 20th century

Hospício nacional de alienados e a Neurologia brasileira no início do século 20

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ABSTRACT
The modern Brazilian Neurology was born in the campus of Praia Vermelha, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). The former National Hospice for the Insane (NHI) as well as some of its facilities were fundamental for the teaching about diseases of the nervous system to the students of the UFRJ's Medical School, caring for patients with neurosyphilis and epilepsy, as well as children with neurological impairment. We highlight the role of Juliano Moreira, director of the NHI (1903–1930), and his team, including Antonio Austregésilo Rodrigues Lima, the “father” of the Brazilian Neurology, in the construction of the modern Brazilian Psychiatry and Neurology.

Key words: Brazilian neurology, psychiatry, neuropsychiatry, history of neurosciences.

RESUMO

Palavras-Chave: neurologia brasileira, psiquiatria, neuropsiquiatria, história das neurociências.
To overcome the problems reported by previous commissions, new pavilions were built for children and epileptic patients. Those prepared for the epileptics “quiet” or “semi-quiet” were: the Griesinger (for women) and Guislain (for men). Special beds were lined with wooden boards to prevent patients from falling in case of nocturnal seizures. Back then, it was believed that patients with epilepsy had symptoms that could lead them to commit the worst kind of folly, so they should go through a process of social rehabilitation and were kept from living freely in society. Lima Barreto, famous writer and NHI patient, supported this idea when he described the behavior of a colleague. In his view, this patient had an “illusory sanity” because of his delusion from time to time. The same writer, according to Neves, looked at a boy with epilepsy and imagined his dark fate: “the whole damn life imprisoned by the attack, whose appearance cannot be predicted...” For treatment and reduction of seizures, according to Lemos, the sectors were suggested a modification in diet, so it should become vegetarian, dechlorinated, and the patient should not take any kind of stimulating beverage such as coffee. Satisfactory results were only obtained in the female sector, according to Lemos.

The Bourneville Pavilion-School was founded in 1904, and directed for 15 years by Fernandes Figueira. The institution held a room with exercise equipment, for education to boys and girls, with proper beds and garden sets. As recommended by Desire Magloire Bourneville, it was the first medico-pedagogical oriented institution in Brazil. The patients were divided into groups. Call attention to the clientele division on valid and invalid, to the purpose of education or simple rehabilitation and/or hygiene measures.

Moreira installed a clinical laboratory and established a routine for diagnostic lumbar puncture. The relevance of neurosyphilis in the first decades of the 20th century coupled with the great interest in the subject by Moreira influenced the later creation of the Institute of Neurosyphilis. Currently, it was turned into a psychiatric hospital named Philippe Pinel Institute.

In 1938, the former Observation Pavilion became the Institute for Psychopathology and Assistance Psychopaths (Fig 3), and transferred to the University of Brazil. Nowadays, it is known as Institute of Psychiatry of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).
Moreira published several works in Psychiatry and severe systemic disease with potential coetaneous and neuropsychiatric repercussions (syphilis, leprosy and arsenic poisoning). Together with Afrânio Peixoto, he was the founder of the first national journal specialized in Neuropsychiatry, printed in the typography of the NHA: *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psiquiatria, Neurologia e Ciências Afins* (1905). It had, later on, its name changed to *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psiquiatria, Neurologia e Medicina Legal* (1908) because of a Society founded the year before which had the same name. In 1919, the journal was named *Arquivos Brasileiros de Neurúria e Psiquiatria*. From 1915, each field of knowledge had a responsible editor. Neurology was under the supervision of Austregésilo, with the collaboration of Faustino Esposel, Moreira da Fonseca and Waldemar Schiller.

In 1944, the transference of the remaining patients of NHI was concluded. Afterwards, the area was handed over to *Universidade do Brasil*, currently known as UFRJ, where one of the institution’s campi is located. From the former NHA medical services, the current Institute of Psychiatry, the Philippe Pinel Institute (next to the campus) and the Institute of Neurology (Fig 4) are still held. This latter was started with some modules for Austregésilo, in 1926. Deolindo Couto, Austregésilo’s successor, established officially it in December 16, 1946.

CONCLUSIONS

The former NHI and surrounding areas was the birthplace of the modern Brazilian Neurology (besides the Psychiatry), primarily under the impulse of Juliano Moreira, in association with Afrânio Peixoto, but achieving great prestige and reputation at the time of Austregésilo and Deolindo Couto.

References