OBITUARY

JOSÉ BORGES SALES (1911-2006)

José Borges Sales, MD, a tropical disease specialist from northeastern Brazil, has his name intimately linked to the history of visceral leishmaniasis (kala-azar) in the State of Ceará, Brazil. He was born on February 10, 1911 in Paraíba State, northeastern Brazil, and graduated from medical school in 1937, in Salvador, Bahia. He worked as a family physician in several municipalities and four States, from 1938 to 1944. In 1945 he was appointed Head of the Central Laboratory of the Department of Health of Ceará, as a public official of the National Department of Health.

The discovery of kala-azar in Brazil was contemporary with his medical student years. Indeed, Kala-azar was first described in Brazil, in 1934, by Penna [1], through post mortem liver specimens meant to screen for yellow fever. At that time a law was passed determining that all individuals who died of an acute febrile illness should have a liver specimen removed for histopathological examination. The procedure was carried out by a lay person, using an instrument called viscerotome. The liver material was usually obtained in the cemetery before burial.

The magnitude of the problem was enormous; from 1953 to 1957, 1840 cases of visceral leishmaniasis were diagnosed in vivo in Brazil; 1493 cases (80%) were from Ceará [3]. In 1949 Dr. Borges Sales was appointed Professor of Microbiology of the Federal University of Ceará, position from which he only retired in 1981. His writings were mostly concerned with the endemic diseases in Ceará. In 1952, even before the Sobral epidemic, he was concerned with leishmaniasis [6] and his interest in the State of Ceará was gigantic, so that, in 1978, he wrote a book listing all articles published by physicians from the State he had adopted as his second homeland. After retiring Dr. Sales continued very active in the local medical society, as member of the Ceará Academy of Medicine, taking responsibility for editing all publications of that collegiate. He published 50 papers and 4 books, the last one in 2005.

José Borges Sales died on May 12th, 2006, at the age of 95.

References

Anastácio de Queiroz Sousa and Dalgimar Beserra de Menezes
Núcleo de Medicina Tropical, Department of Clinical Medicine and Pathology
School of Medicine, Federal University of Ceará, Brazil
aqsousa@gmail.com

The Brazilian Journal of Infectious Diseases 2007;11(1):182. © 2007 by The Brazilian Journal of Infectious Diseases and Contexto Publishing. All rights reserved.