

Eduardo Olavo da Rocha e Silva (★1926 +2014)

Dr. Rocha has been considered one of the most important figures in the fight against American trypanosomiasis (Chagas disease). As part of the elite of sanitarians that had already eliminated malaria in the State of São Paulo in the 1940s, he led the effort against Chagas disease with great commitment and competence beginning in the 1960s, an enormous task that gave rise to the pioneering studies of Pedreira de Freitas and Emmanuel Dias. The State of São Paulo, historically autonomous in Public Health actions, had generated a plethora of sanitarians from the fundamental studies and examples of Emílio Ribas and Samuel Pessoa, whose work was continued by disciples of enormous knowledge and energy, dedicated to facing and reducing the spread of endemic diseases (Walter Leser, José de Toledo Piza, Vitor Homem de Melo, Renato Correa, among others). In close interaction with São Paulo University, the government of São Paulo had begun to confront endemic malaria in 1932 by creating the *Section for Malaria Studies and Prophylaxis*, later the *Service of Prophylaxis of Malaria*, leading to the elimination of this disease as a Public Health problem by 1968. During the 1970s, the Service was expanded under the name of the *Superintendence for Endemic Diseases Control* (SUCEN), a model institution in continuous operation until today.

In São Paulo, Chagas disease was a government priority in the 1960s, with a program based on vector control through systematic research and through the spraying of infested dwellings with insecticide. Across the endemic area, in only a few years, a consequent decrease of domestic vector infestation and disease prevalence in younger age groups was registered. Further, in the 1980s, serological screening of blood donors was implemented, aiming to prevent the transfusion transmission of HIV, hepatitis B, syphilis, and Chagas disease. In view of its excellent results and methodology, this program was taken as a reference, constituting a strong argument for stepping up the effort against the disease in the rest of Brazil and leading in particular to the emergence of the Intergovernmental Southern Cone Initiative Against Chagas Disease (1991). Dr. Rocha was present at the center of this glorious history as the leader of vector control activities in São Paulo.

All his life, Dr. Rocha was a gentle and tender but consequential and hardworking person, extremely devoted to family, work, students, and friends. After finishing his medical degree at the Brazilian Medical Faculty (Rio de Janeiro) in 1954, he completed two postgraduate extensions in Preventive Medicine at the Public Health School of São Paulo and the National School of Public Health (Rio de Janeiro). Next, he completed his specialization in public health by working two



Dr. Rocha e Silva (center), with Aluizio Prata and João Carlos P. Dias on the occasion of the Brazilian certification of the elimination of Chagas disease transmission by *Triatoma infestans* and blood transfusion. Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Brasília, May 30, 2006.

years in the Special Service of Public Health (Portuguese acronym SESP) in the State of Pará. His admittance to the São Paulo Service of Prophylaxis of Malaria (1958), a new step in his applied work and academic studies, brought him closer to the University of São Paulo. Specializing in Malariology, Entomology, Public Health, and Tropical Medicine, he soon became an excellent teacher of Epidemiology in the Public Health Schools of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where with his striking personality and capacity to solve problems he participated in the cultivation of many sanitarians and researchers. Engaged with Chagas disease, Dr. Rocha very soon assumed a strong leadership role in the state control program. Combining his sanitarian activities with academic research, he conducted and published numerous studies about the vectors and the control of Chagas disease, becoming one of the main architects of *Triatoma infestans* elimination in São Paulo (certification in 2002). Recognized nationally and internationally, he was several times required to participate in technical meetings and working groups in Brazil and abroad (especially in Peru), frequently acting as a Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) temporary advisor and a Scientific Researcher of SUCEN. Dr. Rocha was also an active member of the Brazilian Societies of Tropical Medicine, Hygiene, Entomology, and Parasitology. Among many other distinctions, he was awarded with the Carlos Chagas medal of the Minas Gerais Government (1985), received public recognition from the

Brazilian community of researchers and health workers dedicated to Chagas disease (Uberaba Meeting, 2005) and was granted an Honorable Mention from the Ministry of Health of Brazil during the national certification of *T. infestans* elimination (2006).

Dr. Rocha held several advising and executive positions in SUCEN and in the Academy, serving as regional director in Marília, Prudente, and São Vicente, director of the Scientific Research Association of São Paulo, and president of the Tropical Medicine Department of the Medical Association. Taking a seat on the State Permanent Commission of Science and Technology, he actively participated in the implementation

of the state's Health Information System and the publication of the São Paulo Health Secretariat's *Bulletin of the Health Bibliography*. In particular, he wrote the chapter on Chagas prophylaxis in the classical Brener and Andrade book (1979), and was a part of the writing group of the Manual of Laboratory Standards for Chagas disease (Brazilian Ministry of Health, 1981). In spite of his official retirement in 1986, he continued for many years to cooperate with SUCEN as a senior advisor and associate researcher, publishing important scientific works about *Triatominae* biology and control. His life was undoubtedly worthwhile. *Requiescat in pace.*

João Carlos Pinto Dias

Emeritus Researcher

Centro de Pesquisas René Rachou

Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, (CPqRR/FIOCRUZ-MG), Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

jcpdias@cpqrr.fiocruz.br

Vera Lúcia Cortiço Corrêa Rodrigues

Associate Researcher

Superintendência de Controle de Endemias (SUCEN-SP), SP, Brazil

veracorrea@dglnet.com.br