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Obituary

Donato D'Ângelo (1919–2014): a giant in many aspects[☆]

Donato D'Ângelo (1919 – 2014): um gigante em muitos aspectos

Donato D'Ângelo was born in Petrópolis, “the city of D. Pedro, Thereza Christina, Isabel and all of us”, in the Serrana region of the state of Rio de Janeiro, and was considered to be a giant in many, many respects. He entered the Fluminense School of Medicine, in Niterói, at the age of 14 years and graduated at the age of 20 years, in 1939. He is considered to have been the youngest doctor in Brazil (profile published by SBCOC).

He spent one year and two months at the Bologna Institute, in Italy, under the guidance of Vitorio Putti, where he sought to learn about post-war advances in orthopedics. There too, he established his liking for the arts, literature and history.

Back in Brazil, he coordinated the installation of several orthopedics services, thereby consolidating the specialty, in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Ipanema and São Zacharias hospitals) and in Petrópolis (Hospital Santa Tereza). In the latter city, he founded the School of Medicine and was the titular professor of orthopedics for 31 years (where he established an orthopedics training center of excellence), and was also the titular professor of the rehabilitation school of the Catholic University. In Teresópolis, he was head of the orthopedics service from 1973 to 1976.

Humanism was a marked trait of Donato's professional life. He had the ability, shared by few others, to move between the scientific and literary worlds, and between medicine for wealthy people and medicine for socially excluded people. He attended children of the area of Cachoeiro do Itapemirim who would become the icon of the “Young Vanguard”, without ever charging a penny.

Despite receiving homage several times from the “king” Roberto Carlos, Donato never took advantage of his unaccustomed professional fame. In fact, through his silence, he taught us how to maintain ethics and not to use the names of famous people to accumulate clientele.

“He was a very dear person, with incomparable technical competence, and was extremely dedicated to his patients. We would like to train more doctors like him”, said Maria Isabel, of the Petrópolis School of Medicine.

He was dedicated like few others to the Brazilian Association of Orthopedics and Traumatology (SBOT) throughout his professional life, where he provided leadership with an ethical approach, common sense and frugality in many different areas. He was an examiner for the Teaching and Training Committee for decades. He was editor-in-chief of the RBO for an impressive 28 years, from 1970 to 1998. He represented Brazil in SICOT for 9 years. He presided over the 20th Brazilian Congress of Orthopedics and Traumatology in 1975, SBOT from 1978 to 1979 and the Shoulder Society from 1988 to 1989. His doctoral thesis of 1970, on recurrent shoulder dislocation, yielded dozens of international citations, without ever having been published. For this reason, he was considered by the new generation to be the “father of shoulder surgery in Brazil”. He was a founder-member of several medical associations.

As a humanist, Donato reserved time for the “Academies”, and there was a long list of them: Fluminense Academy of Medicine, Brazilian Academy of Military Medicine, National Academy of Medicine and Petrópolis Academy of Literature. In all of these, Donato was always welcomed, listened to and admired. He received the Koëler Medal at the Quitandinha Palace, in Petrópolis, in 2000, which was an occasion of acknowledgement of this humanism.

Because of his recognized intellectual and work capacity, Donato received several awards over the course of his career. Prominent among these were the Medal of the Order of Naval Merit (1975), the title of Distinguished Physician of the State of Rio de Janeiro (1991) and Congratulatory Motions from the Municipal Chamber of Petrópolis, in the years 1971, 1975, 1989 and 1995. The Brazilian College of Surgeons granted him the title of Emeritus Member in 1991.

With the charming Wanda, his companion at all times, he experienced a beautiful history of love. He had six children, who gave him grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great affection. During his last years, he was confined to his home, convalescing from a massive stroke. He passed away in the comfort of his home, on the day on which he completed 95 years.

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What remains is the memory of that white hair, the ever-ready smile and the conciliatory dialogue of a dedicated doctor and leader of the orthopedic community who never asked for anything in exchange; and also a literary figure and man of goodwill.

Donato D'Ângelo was indeed a giant in many respects.

Those who knew him well know that the list of praise goes much further. Our orthopedics has been orphaned and has less glamour.

Osvandré Lech

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