HISTORICAL REVIEW OF MEXICAN BLOOD TRANSFUSION

Banquet Address by Dr. Eduardo Uribe Guerola, International Hematology and Rh Conference, Dallas, Texas—Mexico City, Mexico, November, 1946

President Dr. Hill; Medical Authorities of Dallas, Texas; Dear Doctors; Ladies and Gentlemen:

This conference takes place in affiliation with the Second Mexican Blood Transfusion Congress.

Now allow me to state briefly the outstanding points of Mexican Medical History. Mexico is a name which, in the minds of many persons, has had connotations quite different from reality. For some people it appears to be exotic, for others it is romantic, and for yet others it is an odd country. What I want to say briefly is that the first inhabitants of Mexico, the Aztecs, Mixtecas, Toltecas, Otomies, Chichimecas and Mayas practiced medicine according to their times, and the Goddess Tzapotlaltenan presided over general medicine. Blood was named “eztli.” They noticed the circulation of blood by the beating at the end of the heart called “tetecuicaliztil” and by the radial beating to which they attached the name “tlahuatl y tetecuicoca.” However, for them, medicine was considered a trade.

Training was given as that of a trade and knowledge was handed down from father to son, with the fathers teaching their sons the correct names of the diseases and how to cure them by means of herbs. Surgical instruments were kept and used in suitable cases.

Ancient Mexicans obtained their medicines from the three kingdoms of nature: animal, mineral, and vegetable. Of the three kingdoms, the vegetable kingdom was the one to which they paid the most attention, and the one which they came to know best. Taking advantage of their knowledge has made it easier to study the several species of plants, forming groups to be used according to modern therapeutics.

As you well know, Christopher Columbus discovered the American continent on the twelfth of October 1492. Later, in the year 1519, Hernando Cortes arrived in the city of Mexico. From that date to September 1821, when Mexican independence was consummated, Mexican soil was a Spanish colony. There are four transcendental facts related to that period of time which are necessary to point out. Mexico was vested with the privilege to possess, before any other country on the American continent, the first hospital, the first printing press, the first university,* and the first book of medicine. The first hospital on the American continent was founded in 1524. It was given the name “Hospital de la Limpia Concepición” and finally the name “Hospital de Jesús,” a name which it has up to the present time. This hospital has been giving uninterrupted service for a period of 422 years. It is a building of large courtyards and handsome arches, part of which is considered the most ancient construction that the city possesses. On the other hand, the remaining

*This statement might be challenged both in Peru and in the Dominican Republic. Ed.
The first printing press established on the American continent arrived in Mexico in 1539. The first university on the American Continent was founded in 1553. Its name was "Real Universidad de Mexico." It is worthwhile to mention the curious fact that the public ceremony announcing its inauguration took place in the church of the school of San Pablo de los Agustinos. This church, rebuilt in 1570 and transformed in 1932, is today the auditorium of Juarez Hospital; and, in this auditorium will take place one of the meetings of this Second Mexican Blood Transfusion Congress.

In Mexico, in 1570, was printed the first book on medicine that was published on the American continent, entitled "Opera Medicinales," by Francisco Bravo.

During the seventeenth century medicine progressed. Great progress in surgery was made during the eighteenth century. On the tenth of April 1770, the Real College of Surgery was inaugurated.

During the third and last period, from Mexico's independence up to the present time, we find that once Mexican independence was consummated in September of 1821, the twenty-third of October, 1833, the Mexican Faculty of Medicine was founded. It is today 113 years old and since 1854 has occupied the same building. This building was called the "Inquisition" because in it was held the terrible Inquisition Tribunal, from 1736 until 1820.

The Mexican Medicine Faculty during the nineteenth century progressed in general form, emerging from the metaphysical period into the positive, relying on prominent directors and professors. At present, in the year 1946, the attendance of students in the Faculty of Medicine is as high as 4,500.

Two hospitals cooperate fundamentally with the Faculty for the teaching of clinic and surgery: the General and the Juarez hospitals.

The General Hospital had a predecessor, the San Andres Hospital, founded in 1779, which was replaced by the present General Hospital inaugurated in 1905. This hospital has always excelled as the leader of medicine in Mexico.

The Juarez Hospital, the place where we shall meet next week, has been considered from its founding up to the present time as the Mexican School of Surgery. It was founded as a hospital in 1847. Next year it will complete 100 years of continuous service. The building which it now occupies had its origin in the sixteenth century. Fray Pedro de Gante founded the Parish of Indios de San Pablo which was under the jurisdiction of the Franciscan priests. In 1575, the Augustin religious order took charge of the church and established there the Augustins' school. A short time later, part of the building was used as a military headquarters. Later it was transformed into a hospital. On August 23, 1847, it was inaugurated with the name of "Hospital de San Pablo." Since that time it has been considered the municipal hospital of the city. It was under the charge of the Sisters of Charity and changed its name to Hospital Juarez in 1872, a name which it keeps up to the present time. During the nineteenth century and for a part of the twentieth century, the Hospital Juarez had undergone several improvements in construction in an attempt to modernize it. For those who do us the honor of entering this old building, we take the liberty to remind you that the house is 100 years old and does not rely on...
modern installations. Our dear hospital is old fashioned, modest, but, nevertheless, it is still the leading surgery school in Mexico. The Juarez Hospital Surgical Society was founded in 1930. I have the honor of being the President of this institution at the present time. Its motto is to better surgery through constant collaboration. In order to obtain and give general knowledge in surgery, in 1932, the Surgery Society founded the Institute of National Surgeons Assemblies. Six assemblies have taken place, one every two years. We are now celebrating the seventh one and we consider it an extraordinary privilege that this International Conference takes place in affiliation with the Seventh Assembly.

Honored gentlemen, with this brief summary, I have tried to give you an idea of the history of medicine in the country where we are going to have the pleasure to have you as our guests. We are extending to you a most cordial welcome and are asking in a most kindly manner to make yourselves at home.

In the aspect of blood transfusions, it is convenient to point out that Mexican historians have found facts that give them assurance that the first blood transfusion performed on the American continent took place in the City of Mexico in 1845 in a case of hemorrhage, a fact that has been jotted down in several publications at that time and that has been scrupulously examined and analyzed by the historian, Dr. Jose Alcantara. The first publication on blood transfusion appeared in Mexico in December of 1874 under the title "Studies of Blood Transfusion." This study is of particular interest since it expresses the ideas of that time and since some of them are still accepted today.

Interest in blood transfusions mounted steadily until 1925. In 1930, numerous services were established and the work of publication and teaching was evident. By this means, it was made possible for the Republic to enjoy its benefits. The Juarez Blood Transfusion Center, under my care, has contributed in an important measure to the progress and knowledge of transfusion. This center was founded in 1932 and has published thirty-six papers. In 1937, the center was represented at the Second International Blood Transfusion Congress which took place in Paris, France, and at which so many important facts were decided with regard to blood groups, preserved blood, hematological and organization problems. On the twenty-fourth of April 1938, through the initiative of the Juarez Hospital, the Mexican Blood Transfusion Society was founded. In May 1938, it gave a postgraduate course. In November 1941, it realized a great accomplishment, the friendship of the William Buchanan Blood, Plasma, and Serum Center, and of its Director, Dr. Joseph M. Hill. From the beginning, this friendship has been a solid one, and has made it possible that Baylor and Juarez work together with the best understanding. I render my deepest homage to Dr. Hill for his knowledge and extraordinary work, a demonstration of which are the brilliant results of these conferences and the success which they have obtained through world acknowledgement and recognition. Nor can we fail to recognize that all this has been made possible by the exceptional organization obtained by Chairman Dr. Hill and his secretary, Dr. Haberman, to whom I direct my enthusiastic congratulations.

Then, in August of 1942, in the Juarez Hospital was founded the first blood bank in the Republic. In November 1942, the first Mexican Blood Transfusion Congress
was established. Its purpose was to obtain a general knowledge of transfusion problems with special emphasis upon blood groups and the usage of plasma. And we have arrived at important conclusions. Now, in November 1946, we are celebrating the Second Mexican Blood Transfusion Congress and this International Conference. Baylor and Juarez wish to work together toward general orientation in the second of the greatest discoveries relating to transfusion in the present century, i.e. the discovery of the Rh factor. We intend to arrive at conclusions particularly on those points:

1. Which technics should we recommend for the routine investigation of the Rh factor and its subtypes?

2. What nomenclature of the Rh and its subtypes should be adopted?

3. Is it not incumbent on us to explore the possibility of establishing an International Hematology Association, possibly with biannual meetings, taking into consideration that air transportation brings all countries close together not only in space but in ideas as well. Such an organization could promote our scientific advancement.

We want to hear your opinions in order that we may consider them from now until our last meeting on Saturday, November 23, in Mexico City so that it will be possible to arrive at conclusions concerning these points which we have submitted to you.

Baylor and Juarez wish to thank, with all our compliments, the official speakers of the Conference and of the Congress for their very valuable cooperation. We do not forget that they left their very important occupations and came to give us of their knowledge. We recognize too the presence of each one of the attendants which contributes and gives more significance to the meetings, and we beg you to join with us in expressing our gratitude for the great contributions to human welfare and scientific advancement made by the late Dr. Karl Landsteiner.

We are doing our best to do good work. We are making our best effort to obtain a good result. And we shall do it regardless of the truth about knowledge which is so beautifully expressed in the words of the famous English poet:

THOU knowest all; I seek in vain
What lands to till or sow with seed;
The land is black with briar and weed
Nor cares for falling tears or rain.

THOU knowest all; I sit and wait
With blinded eyes and hands that fail;
Till the last lifting of the veil
And the first opening of the gate.

THOU knowest all; I cannot see.
I trust I shall not live in vain;
I know that we shall meet again
In some divine eternity.
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