In Memoriam

Prof. Ángel Ballabriga
(1920–2008)

It is difficult to briefly outline the exceptional scientific and human path of Prof. Ángel Ballabriga. In his youth his strong personality was forged as a consequence of the difficulties he encountered; at the age of 17 he was mobilized during the Spanish Civil War, damaging his left knee, and being sent inland to a concentration camp. After the Civil War he studied medicine in Barcelona; he graduated in 1943 and completed his doctorate degree in 1946.

He complemented his pediatric training by working in hospitals with Profs. Glanzmann (Bern), Wallgren (Stockholm), Lelong (Paris) and Smith (Boston). From 1958 to 1965 he was Director of the Premature Babies’ Centre of the Provincial Maternity Hospital of Barcelona where his efforts were significant in diminishing the level of neonatal mortality.

In 1965 his work acquired greater significance when he was named Director of the Children’s Clinic of the Hospital Vall d’Hebron in Barcelona. There, he created a welfare model based on the autonomous functioning of sub-specialties that had positive repercussions on both the diagnostic and therapeutic levels. In 1976 he became an extraordinary Professor of Pediatrics of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, carrying out an enormous educational workload, not only for post-doctorate students but also in specialist training. In 1988 he was named Honorary Professor of Pediatrics and, finally, during 1992–1996 became Director of the Unit of Biomedical Research in Pediatrics of the Hospital Vall d’Hebron in Barcelona.

He published more than 200 articles in high level national and international pediatric journals. His investigative work centered principally on nutrition, neonatology and the development of the brain; his works on the metabolic system of the newborn, the myelinization of the brain, and the composition of the retina are especially outstanding.

His excellent worldwide reputation enabled him to organize in 1980 the 16th International Congress of Pediatrics and the 7th European Congress of Perinatal Medicine in Barcelona. He was also presented with a number of awards, among which were an award from the International Pediatric Association and the honorary degree of Doctor Honoris Causa from the universities of Valladolid and Lisbon.

It is also important to mention his collaboration over several decades as a member of the Annales Nestlé Editorial Committee where his great professionalism and his advanced vision of the events clearly contributed to the international prestige that Annales Nestlé has today.

We would not like to finish these lines without mentioning his extraordinary personality. To those who had the opportunity to know him personally, he was a very affectionate and cultural person, and a great conversationalist.