

Medical Research and the Argentine Society of Cardiology

Medical research, either clinical and basic or applied, is the platform of scientific development of medicine in general and –in our case– of cardiology in particular.

As cardiologists, our mission is to heal the patient with heart disease and –with a more recent concept– to prevent disease. For that purpose, we should strive for excellence in the development of the specialty, and to achieve this goal, we must focus on three basic principles that have been described for medicine in general, but are certainly applicable to our discipline. This tripod is based on care, teaching and research.

Care, to achieve the ultimate goal of healing or preserving cardiovascular health; teaching, to properly train providers for that goal; research, to enrich the information that constitutes the body of the scientific discipline in question.

Our Society includes all these aspects among its objectives, since the mission of cardiology development in our country involves fostering scientific expertise (research), as well as raising the level of our specialists (teaching, training) to achieve the ultimate goal of providing the best care for our patients.

Two milestones in the history of our Society had an impact on research development. One of them took place 74 years ago, at the foundation of our Society; the Statute of its constitution included the following:

“To encourage the progress and dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge in Cardiology and to promote research in this branch of Medicine...”

The other one took place 20 years ago, with the creation of the Research Area within the central Argentine Society of Cardiology (SAC).

In the first one, many of the founding members of our Society were prominent researchers who positioned Argentine cardiology in a regional leadership role and, in some cases, with international impact.

The second one determined ongoing research activities in various aspects: development of this discipline through training in research methodology and biomedical statistics, the contents of which were useful for those who came to our headquarters, and also to the districts; it consisted of methodological advice and the inclusion in regional research projects aimed at the dual purpose of gathering data from the local reality and encouraging research in different parts of our country. The establishment of a SAC network of institutions for conducting records has also been included in the Research Area.

However, on different occasions it has been questioned whether scientific societies should make or

simply promote research. This question, luckily less and less frequently asked, seems inconsistent today, since what was aimed at was the conventional research led by a scientific society, whereas other aspects of research –such as conducting records about local health care reality and using published therapeutic evidences in the real world– are possible actions for a scientific society and provide a very important view when applying the randomized evidence from conventional research to the community.

Despite the above mentioned, cardiology research in our country has lost ground in recent years. As early as 2001, Cingolani pointed out the underrepresentation of our scientific works in international congresses and high-impact and half-life publications in a RAC editorial letter (Vol 69 n° 2, March-April 2001). Our region was only represented by our country, Brazil, Mexico and Chile.

It is likely that this situation has not improved over the past decade, and that even our position in the region has worsened.

This letter does not aim at analyzing the reasons of this problem and its possible solution (higher budget for research, system of rewards and punishments for institutions that perform (or not) these tasks, projects to train researchers, etc.); however, our Society cannot ignore certain aspects with a view to the coming years.

At least two aspects should be considered and addressed promptly.

First of all, to enhance the contents and achievements of the Research Area, but focusing on the Regional Districts, so that a growing proportion of the working time in the area be spent on cooperative interaction with the different regions of our country. For that purpose, joint work between the Research and the District Areas in central SAC will be encouraged. That is, one of the aims will be to make research grow both in central SAC and in its constitutive Districts.

The second aspect refers to funding for research projects provided by our Society. This issue addresses the statutory obligation to promote research in cardiology, and leaves aside the question referred to whether scientific societies should conduct research or not. It is clear that our Society cannot conduct research per se but is incumbent upon the selection, promotion and supervision of research projects proposed by cardiologists to be conducted in their workplaces.

With that spirit, the first SAC Research Scholarship for young cardiologists has been launched: it will last for a year and will be granted after a competitive selection

of projects by an Arbitration Committee, in which the Research Area will have an active role. The project getting this first scholarship will be supervised by the SAC; after the evaluation of periodic reports on the progress of the research, the project will conclude with a final report that may be submitted to our Argentine Congress of Cardiology.

Also, we are advancing to launch a second SAC Scholarship, this time with the support of the National Ministry of Health. Its launch is planned for 2012.

This SAC - Ministry of Health Scholarship will have the same characteristics as the first one, except for an orientation towards epidemiology and prevention issues.

A more ambitious –and also likely– goal takes into consideration that, in a rather short time, our Society can have a scholarship fund for research in cardiology subspecialties, and that completed projects can be presented in a special session of our Argentine Congress of Cardiology, and then be published. This exposure of maximum national and regional hierarchy will thus show attendees not only the excellence of scientific contents and the awards our institution gives to the best scientific works, but also our cardiologists' research projects, selected, supervised and financially supported by the Argentine Society of Cardiology.

Supporting the development of medical research performed by young cardiologists will allow for cardiology training improvement within strict scientific discipline, which will result in medical quality for their professional future, no matter if they then devote themselves to health care activities, as has indeed occurred in most cases. However, it is also possible that

after the scholarship opportunity provided by the SAC, some of them engage in (basic or applied) research.

In other cases, conducting a paid research project may allow the fellow to remain in the institution where he/she has been trained after the training cycle is over; it provides an additional benefit to his/her insertion into professional life. The Argentine Society of Cardiology is also benefited, because it reinforces the fulfillment of its mission and facilitates the approach of cardiologists to the institution through specific high-quality services for the hierarchy of professionals in particular, and of cardiology in general.

The development of a SAC Research Scholarship program, in addition to what our Society has achieved in this field (teaching in research methodology and biostatistics, methodological support for research projects, conduction of records through the SAC network, awards for the best scientific works in the specialty), make it possible to close the virtuous circle of research in our institution, whose power in the coming years will have to be our entire responsibility and dedication.

Finally, research in science –cardiology in this case– not only provides knowledge for a better quality of life, but is also an indicator of leadership in the discipline of the center, institution or country supporting and developing it. We believe that the creation of a SAC Research Scholarship program will make a modest but real contribution in this direction.

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