



Carlos Gómez Durán

Carlos Gómez Durán Lafleur passed away on June 11, 2017 at the age of 85 in Bilbao, due to pulmonary complications associated with the Alzheimer's disease he had been suffering for many years. In 1956, he completed his M.D. in Medicine and Surgery at the University of Madrid, followed by a residency in Thoracic Surgery at the Broussais Hospital in Paris. There, his teachers were Charles Dubost and Jean Paul Binet. In Paris, Dr. Durán started his experimental studies on porcine xenografts.

From Paris he went to Oxford University, where he became famous as world pioneer in heart valve replacement. Together with Alf Guning, Dr. Durán developed the orthotopic aortic homograft implantation technique in a *roulotte* placed in the courtyard of the Radcliffe Infirmary Hospital.

On the second half of the '60s, he returned to the University Clinic in Navarra to launch and develop cardiac surgery. It was a time in which –as he said in an interview in 2010– *“We were creating surgery while we were practicing it. When facing the operation, one cannot miss a second in philosophies, since there is no time for feelings, only for action.”* Dr. Durán turned Pamplona into an international reference center for tricuspid and mitral valve repair.

The emblematic Hospital Marqués de Valdecilla, built in Spain in 1928, was rebuilt in 1974 and the hospital's refoundation was initiated with the registration of Carlos Gómez Durán. He went to Santander with most of his team from Pamplona. During that 14-year period, he was the main protagonist of the international prestige and impact of Hospital Marqués de Valdecilla through the development of cardiovascular surgery with a Department that was the health reference in the north of Spain: tricuspid and mitral valve repair developing the flexible annuloplasty ring of Medtronic, simultaneous to the Delrin ring developed by Ramón Arcas, his successor in Pamplona;

aortic valve repair of which he was pioneer; the clinical heart transplant program, started in December 1984, and the fourth Spanish hospital in launching a clinical program and laboratory of experimental surgery at the University of Cantabria.

In 1988, he left Santander and started working at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, was the first hospital in the world that was built without previous budget. He took advantage of these means to create a prestigious Department with excellent professionals and great activity, integrating clinical care with research and teaching.

From the King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh, he went to the University of Montana in USA to launch a new project in 1995. He founded the Heart Institute of Montana in the capital city, Missoula. There, he took advantage of the support he was offered to develop an exceptional research and health care activity, focused on heart valve repair.

In addition to being an excellent surgeon, researcher and teacher, pioneer of heart valve replacement, Carlos Gómez Durán had an exceptional personality and mind to predict the future of our specialty. As President of the Spanish Society of Cardiovascular Surgery and President of the Specialty Committee, he predicted the risks of our specialty and promoted the necessary changes. Carlos Gómez Durán's personality was exceptional. I decided to be a cardiac surgeon when, while attending the second year at the School of Medicine in the University of Navarra; I met him and was captivated by his personality. This was confirmed when I was in fourth year and spent the summer as intern student at the Department of Cardiac Surgery he had just created at the University Hospital Marqués de Valdecilla.

Carlos Gómez Durán said he was happy because he had always done what he liked. He conveyed great enthusiasm and shared it with everybody, convinc-

ing them that they were doing something worthwhile, regardless of the hours and sacrifice it might demand. He was always in favor of teamwork rather than work team –which is not the same. It was a united team, a closed-knit group, with a feeling that all its members were equally important. Carlos Gómez Durán managed to bring out the best in every team member.

Dr. Durán was buried in his family pantheon in Our Lady of Almudena Cemetery, in Madrid. As the

teacher he was, his example will continue to live in the hospitals where he developed the Departments of Cardiovascular Surgery, as well as in the future generations of cardiovascular surgeons.

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