

Armando Laffón Roca (1949-2007)

As I write these paragraphs a goodbye for Armando, nothing serves me better than a photograph from his medical youth. It was during that period of his life that I met Armando Laffón Roca in what was then the Gran Hospital del Estado, now called Hospital de la Princesa, in the month of June 1977. On the first day of that month I had taken over as the person responsible for the Unit of Rheumatology of the hospital and immediately found Armando who, having started his training in internal medicine, having obtained a position through the MIR matching process, started his specialty training in rheumatology and was working, starting in our specialty, with Dr Carlos Ossorio, in the department of Dr Federico García López. Armando started work from the first moment in the section of Rheumatology with Ossorio and myself. Armando was the paradigm of the resident physician full with enthusiasm for the medical profession, with the possibility of correctly completing training and therefore willing to restlessly work and study limitlessly. These characteristics were explicitly evident in a joyful and fun person, with a great capacity for work, extroverted in such a manner that it was not necessary to be very insightful to realize that we were faced with a very special person, without a doubt. Carlos and I set out, as a first objective, to seduce Armando, bringing him closer to the certainties, to then make him see the uncertainties and the unknown spaces of our discipline. Very soon, Armando was motivated to become fully responsible of the assistance area assigned to him in every moment.

He became completely involved in building a unit of rheumatology worthy of that name when we didn't even have an office space. A space that previously was used as

a closet was our only common room. Irene still had not been incorporated to our service but we soon discovered her.

In his practice as a resident he was spectacular. He would visit the hospitalized patients even on Sundays. He would make a detailed round that was vividly reflected in his notes, which pointed out not only the patient's situation, but established after the clinical history and the first complimentary examinations, a differential diagnosis, setting out for a probable diagnosis upon which to work. He would also review those notes with Carlos Ossorio or me, who supervised enthusiastically. Each week he would update the patients' situation, express the criteria established in the academic sessions whether to reach the correct diagnosis or to establish the corresponding treatment. Everyone would be reflected in those "evolution notes." The implementation of such a work method made him grow clinically and scientifically every day, but such a method was based upon hard work and hours of study. Mornings and afternoons were not enough because he needed to confirm his clinical observations through his studies, respond to our occasionally impertinent questioning and, above all, offer patients a full report and detailed treatment that seldom required complementing. It was also a sign of the times. It was clear that this person would go anywhere he wanted. Armando worked without schedules, whether on call or not, and the first thing that told us "this is the one" was our admiration, not only for his work habits but his joy, his way of being, definitively.

He grew, clinically; his expositions were brilliant, he formulated with precision the spaces of our specialty that were unclear or the models of illness that allowed questions to be answered and, most definitely, to achieve a better understanding of the pathology that occupied our lives. After 3 years he had consolidated his assistance capacity; but he also had shown a great gift for the transmission of knowledge to the residents that followed, Aurelio García Monforte and Rita Ortega. He was interested in pathogeny but always kept an eye on etiology, so when he finished his training he decided to continue his training in Mexico, next to Dr Donato Alarcón Segovia, a left for there with his family for 2 years.

With Dr Alarcón Segovia and his group he found what he was looking for: a system to perfect his work method, the development of knowledge in the field of immunology and publications in journals of the highest level. He also found persons that became his friends for life, including Dr Alarcón Segovia, who went from teacher to friend. Armando, in his own way, had also seduced Donato, who offered him a post in that Department of Rheumatology, but Armando, happy to have incorporated new knowledge, felt he owed his country, Spain, a debt. He was an upright Spaniard and understood that his obligation was to "put a shoulder," collaborate in the development of the department in which he had been

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born into rheumatology. When he returned he developed a small immunology laboratory that lives on to this day and which has generated a lot of our research and doctoral thesis, definitely contributions in different intensities and tenors. He first found his immunologic counterpart in Manolo Ortiz de Landázuri and Paco Sánchez Madrid, and afterwards they formed a group of persons in our department that, after attending to the patients during the morning, would continue the laboratory work the rest of the afternoon. Sixteen-hour days; but that was the way many papers came to be, many graduate thesis and a good number of doctoral thesis. All of this was possible thanks to the vital and scientific impulse of Armando.

His capacity for drawing was famous and used it in all of his activities, sessions, conferences or classes to better explain himself, both in simple as in complex matters, making him a great communicator of science. He impregnated this Department of Rheumatology of the Hospital de la Princesa, where he was everything: resident, attending, acting chief of section, official chief of section, head of the department. I remember clearly both his graduate thesis and his doctoral thesis. His graduate thesis aimed to explain the inflammatory infiltrate that was observed in the portal space of patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). In it he questioned, was there any relationship with rheumatoid inflammation? It was pathology. In his doctoral thesis he continued on the subject of inflammatory infiltrate, also in RA by synovial, and into the picture came Integrins. It was immunology. Those were 2 moments of his career and his scientific though that I enjoyed because during the first one I had still not entered politics and the second one occurred when I had returned. Once Armando was installed in the Hospital de la Princesa, colleagues from all of Spain were discovering what we, who had known him for some years, already knew. They did so through his publications in books, journals or his contributions, and conferences at national and international Congresses. He was elected president of the Spanish Society of Rheumatology (SER) in 1999, and was currently an honorary president. He also presided the National Commission of the Specialty. For 19 years he had been Associate Professor of Rheumatology at the School of Medicine of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

I will not detail his resume; today I only want to browse through some lines of that life, which goes way beyond his professional history, having been also seduced by those infrequent characteristics, so exceptional and that sometimes made him so passionate.

Armando Laffón was for me a person I could refer to in our department, in our fights and our battles, in my leaves of absence, and my returns from politics. When I spoke of rheumatology and of Laffón, I felt him and expressed him as something mine, as he was, both virtuous and with

an intelligent human profile as well as extraordinarily emotive.

Today I can say that these considerations on his person and their meaning to me were transmitted to him 10 months ago on the day of my birthday. Dear Armando, wherever you might be, please know that your colleagues at the Department of Rheumatology of the Princesa, of the complete hospital, of many rheumatology departments in Spain, Mexico, Cuba, many persons, a lot of them your patients, who from different places have called me to express first their pain and then their solidarity, we all loved you and, as your memory lives on, we still love you. Good-bye.

Pedro Sabando Suárez

Servicio de Reumatología, Hospital Universitario de la Princesa,
Madrid, Spain

Manuel Figueroa Pedrosa (1940-2007)

On February 9, Manuel Figueroa Pedrosa passed away in Chihuahua, Mexico at the age of 67. Friends and colleagues that witnessed his sudden departure will never forget those moments and the days that followed. We also won't forget the help and affection we received from our Mexican friends and colleagues, the Executive Committee of the Mexican College of Rheumatology as well as all of the support and total disposition of the President and Directors Board of the SER.

On this note we pretend to briefly profile the life of a man of good will, a good physician and an unforgettable friend.

Dr Manuel Figueroa Pedrosa (1940-2007).