

José María Rotella, MD



José María Rotella left us on March 13th, 2020 (city of Tucumán). His untimely death came as a shock and leaves an inexplicable existential void. The scientific community has lost one of its greatest Argentinian orthopedics.

To mention Jose's medical and academic achievements seems redundant, as he accomplished all of them; however, this occasion deserves their recognition to stress the intellectual height of our dear friend.

He studied Medicine at the National University of Tucumán, and graduated in 1975. Soon afterward he decided to move to Buenos Aires, where he completed his postgraduate training in Orthopedics. He entered the National Institute of Rehabilitation under Dr. Eduardo A. Zancolli, with whom he would acquire an all-round education and a close relation, which will prove to be a lifelong friendship.

In 1981, he traveled to the United States together with Eduardo Rafael Zancolli, his colleague and friend, to continue their studies at the duPont Institute, Wilmington, Delaware, and at Hospital for Special Surgery, New York. After coming back from his travel, he returned to the province of Tucumán where he put down roots.

He was a founding member of the **Sanatorio Norte de la ciudad de Tucumán**, where he practiced his professional career and trained more than twenty cohorts of residents. The day he died, a huge number of colleagues and staff members said their last goodbye with a warm and emotional applause.

He received numerous awards and academic recognitions for his scientific work throughout his career, including the Argentinian **National Academy of Medicine Award**, in 1985, for his work: *Microcirugía del miembro superior (Microsurgery of the Upper Limb)*, written in collaboration with other authors.

He published numerous chapters for Orthopedics works and several books, among them, his recent work devoted to the evolution of the upper limb: *Evolución de la especie humana. El éxodo del tacto: cuando la sensibilidad migró del hocico a la mano*; a masterpiece, original in its entirety, that will become mandatory reading for anyone wanting to read or study on such subject matter.

In the fields of **Hand Surgery and Upper Limb Reconstructive Surgery**, he always stood out for his scientific activities. His unique intellect allowed him to develop surgical techniques and procedures that became widely accepted at a national and international level. His dedication to the Basic Sciences was essential to his general education and became apparent in his outstanding presentations and publications on those subjects. He was president of the Argentina Association for Surgery of the Hand and of the South American Federation for Surgery of the Hand, office which he held with full commitment and integrity and for which he earned the well-deserved respect and admiration of his Latin American peers.

He had teaching in his blood, which was apparent not only in his lectures at the Tucumán University (where he worked as Associate Professor since an early age), but also at every informal meeting, every workshop and every congress he attended. Wherever he lectured, it was always a full house!!

I had the honor of serving as Secretary-General during his **Argentine Society of Orthopedics presidency** and to share with him great responsibilities. He was well known for his simplicity and affability for which he not only earn the respect but also the fondness of whom he shared his year in office.

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One of José's most distinguished academic recognitions was being elected a Member of the National Academy of Sciences in 2014, which he remained until his untimely demise.

In October 2016, at the Argentinian National Congress, he received the "Honorable Mention Senator Domingo F. Sarmiento Award," for his life-long medical-scientific efforts. Senator Silvia Elías de Pérez, who advocated for his recognition, stated on that occasion "These outstanding people are making us recover the pride of belonging to Tucumán..." Such was a well-deserved honor for a life devoted to practicing his profession with joy in his heart.

However, all these most deserved recognitions and the manifold testimonies of his competence fail short in covering and describing his unique characteristics which I would encompass, in the name of very many colleagues and friends, as "our Rotella."

José was a good person, a good guy, a good colleague, a good teacher, a good mentor, a good father, a good husband, and a good friend. He was the friend we all wish we had had.

I shared my whole professional life with him, and the other one, the real life, also. Congresses, trips, family reunions, and we even were lucky enough to integrate our wives in this life's journey.

He loved nature and his "small patch of land," which he would always show in his presentations. He was able to daily enjoy both of them as he strolled or went for a ride in his bike. He used these moments to ponder and meditate on the countless projects he had for himself and for his family. José used to call it "my office." He had recently finished a book on the Cultural Heritage of the Valles Calchaquíes, a subject he loved and thoroughly mastered.

He will also be remembered for his sense of humor, which even when he was confronted by serious health issues helped him cope with incredible fortitude.

He is survived by his ideals and thoughts, which we should take up, and by his family, her beloved life-long companion, Lily, and his children, Pilar, José María, Constanza and Luis María, whom he dearly loved and looked after.

May you rest in peace, my dear friend!!!

Mario Rodriguez Sammartino