

Physicians, the Order, and Medicine today – A postelectoral scenario

The evolution of medical activity over the last three decades has led to a painful distortion in the direction of healthcare practice. The silent and insidious imposition of a Medicine that is governed by economic and profit-making interests (a business model of medicine) is seriously threatening the technical, humane, and ethically more desirable and rigorous model. I refer to person-centred Medicine, according to the principles of which successive generations of physicians have been trained. I am not saying we should ignore the need to economically adapt clinical actions, and ponder their consequences, but rather, that we should restore the preference for the humanizing and intelligent clinical interview; the correct and enlightening physical examination; diagnosis as a productive intellectual exercise; and the effective, rehabilitating therapeutic act. It is essential that patients, and their illnesses, are not reduced to a dry, meaningless collection of records of occurrences, and results of complementary diagnostic exams that are becoming progressively more sophisticated. It is essential to use therapies, whose effectiveness has been proven, through conscientious clinical studies, without methodological distortions, the intentions of which are suspect at the very least. Careful consultation of the latest therapeutic controlled studies on interferon alpha in hepatitis C, or clarifying meta-analyses on the interest of peritoneal lavage in acute necrotic-hemorrhagic pancreatitis should be tempered by the reading of texts of eloquent clinical and literary realist style, like the records of Henri Mondor on the acute abdomen, the writings of Sheila Sherlock on hepatobiliary pathology, the descriptions of Graham Hughes on mixed connectivities, or the impressions collected by Allen Barbour on somatoform and physical-physiological reactions as symptomatic causes.

It is essential for physicians, surgeons, or laboratory imaging specialists, as well as anatomists, physiologists, geneticists and pharmacologists, among many others, to strongly and energetically oppose any



influential, deintellectualizing and cruel activity of an economic/financial nature that is primarily governed by the growth of profit and containment of costs.


This regenerating attitude is the responsibility of us all – both as individuals and collectively, through the Order, successor of the Associação dos Médicos Portugueses (Association of Portuguese Physicians), which would now have been a hundred years old (created in 1898 and wound up in 1938). In this scope, the Order and the recently-elected directors, have responsibilities in the federation, to fulfil this true crusade against powerful interests that are unfaithful to our principles and to our independence as liberal professionals.

The extreme importance and sensitivity of the position of the highest dignitary of the Order, and its representative before society and the State – the Chairman, are emphasized. A personality who needs to be almost paradigmatic in the personal, human, technical, moral and cultural spheres, and onto whom all physicians project their personal image, whether in merit or in weakness, must safeguard the honor and the good name of the profession, displaying integrity in the training and exercise of the profession and safeguarding it from the ambitions of more, or less identifiable political, trade union or

economic groups. The Chairman, currently limited by inadequate statutory principles - which make him an essentially decorative figure, divested of the tasks of representation often disinteresting - is denied the effective function of executive coordination, an essential role if the Order is to take up its role as the voice of physicians and defender of the sick.

The Chairman and the members of the bodies of the Order of Physicians now have an arduous task ahead of them, as they are fully aware of the prevailing expectation of organic and functional harmony that promotes attitudes that will help restore the positive image the profession, particularly as an intelligent, serene reality devotion, and with the capacity to communicate and reflect.

After all, what appears as something new is nothing more than a call to attention to the counsel of Hippocrates who, once and for all, should be taken literally and followed: "The physician should have authority. He should have good heart and willingness according to his nature ... His habits must be honored and irreprehensible, thus, he will be serious, humane and fair: because hurried enthusiasm provokes scorn, although it can be very useful"! ■

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script that appears to read 'João Sá'. The signature is enclosed within a simple, hand-drawn rectangular frame.

João Sá