

# Concerning “Humanism and Medicine: Medical history”

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For attentive readers, A. Oliveira Soares gained notoriety more than a decade ago, in the journal “Medicina Interna” with a diverse series of outstanding articles entitled: “Ensino e sua avaliação após a licenciatura em Medicina” (*Teaching and its Evaluation following the Medical Graduation*) (1994); “Estatística em Medicina: o mérito e o mito. Reflexões de um clínico” (*Statistics in Medicine: the merit and the myth. Reflections of a clinic*) (1996); the pertinent concerns expressed in “Para onde vai a Medicina Interna?”<sup>1</sup> (*Where is Internal Medicine heading?*) which in my opinion, deserve new reflection on his part, so many years later; “Iatrogenia: velhos e novos aspectos da face velada da Medicina”,<sup>2</sup> (*Iatrogeny, old and new aspects of the veiled face of Medicine*) with a first paragraph as polished as the opening of “Discurso do Método” (*Discourse of the Method*) by Descartes; “Testemunhas de Jeová: Reflexões sobre a recusa de hemoterapia” (1997) (*Jehovah’s Witnesses: Reflections on the refusal to undergo hemotherapy*) and “O Sangue interdito” (*Forbidden Blood*) (1999); “Reflexões sobre cinco casos cirúrgicos internados num Serviço Hospitalar de Medicina” (*Reflections on five surgical cases admitted to a hospital medical service*) (1998). Also emphasized, after a long interval, it is his understanding and sympathetic letter to a colleague and Resident who wrote one of the most beautiful and painful pages in the journal (“Sem as ilusões do princípio...”) (*Without the illusion of the principle...*)<sup>3</sup> and a recent test-essay, “Figuras médicas na literatura portuguesa” (*Medical figures in Portuguese literature*) with its touching closing dialogue of two veteran doctors in Cós concerning whether they had honored the Hippocratic oath throughout their clinical practice.<sup>4</sup>

In these articles, the medical and general culture of the author are expressed, the coherence of his convictions, the ongoing reflection on the daily practice of Medicine, in its aspects of welfare, and the training of residents, the concerns with the assumption and transmission of values, sometimes painfully, and even at risk of appearing quixotic. Throughout my clinical life, I have also examined myself in these moulds, which not infrequently causes me to evoke that distinguished and missed A. Celso Fontes, Fellow Resident and Head of the Hospital Geral de Santo António, in Porto, in my already distant supplementary residency.

The author’s most recent article, which motivated this letter, mentioned in the title,<sup>5</sup> highlights the eminently clinical trend that doctors nowadays, just as throughout history, should have in relation to the patients who seek out their services. Regardless of the cultural and demographic changes affecting society and the physicians themselves, the startling development of the sciences and technologies where Medicine reaps continual updating a vast spring of knowledge and instrumental resources, the desire expressed by Oliveira Soares remains relevant: “(...) start by listening to the patient and draw up a detailed anamnesis, followed by careful objective examination. With regard to this methodology, it is the first humanist attitude of Medicine with people.” The truth, however, it is that with so many chronic, elderly, demented, highly dependent patients, with an unending burden of services, in many of cases this methodology is more difficult to put into practice, and the possibly premature or redundant use of complementary exams becomes inevitable.

Fulfilling this desire today requires of physicians in general, and residents in particular, now more than ever before, great personal sacrifice, often with little recognition, and without any glorious results. But perhaps then we can face the challenges and dilemmas before us with a clear conscience. ■

## References

1. A. Oliveira Soares. Para onde vai a Medicina Interna? *Medicina Interna* 2000; 7; 2: 131-133.
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3. Maria Inês Leal. Sem as ilusões do princípio... ( e carta de Oliveira Soares no mesmo número). *Medicina Interna* 2004; 11; 4: 216-217.
4. A. Oliveira Soares. Figuras médicas na literatura portuguesa. *Medicina Interna* 2008; 15; 2: 146-153.
5. A. Oliveira Soares. Humanização em Medicina: A história clínica. *Medicina Interna* 2008; 15; 4: 308-313.