

Rui dos Santos Anselmo (1921-2010)

António José de Barros Veloso

It was May 1983. Several dozen doctors were engaged in the Internal Medicine Rounds at the University Hospitals of Coimbra. Months earlier, someone had left a question in the air: “Has there ever been a Portuguese Internal Medicine Association capable of congregating the Internists who finish their specialty each year in the central and district hospitals?” That evening, the answer would be provided preemptively by four participants at the meeting, who vowed to become full members of this association which, they said, had been founded in the 1950s. They just thought it strange that nobody had come to collect the dues for a long time.

But where was this association’s headquarters? Where were the minutes? What had happened to the President and the members of the Board of Directors? It was at this point that someone provided an unexpected piece of information. “Mr. Anselmo is the one who knows all about that.”

The revelation left the vast audience open-mouthed and raised the inevitable question: “Who is Mr. Anselmo?”

Rui Anselmo dos Santos was born in Lisbon, in the parish of Anjos, on 3rd October 1921. His father was a well known journalist who had a press office at the Hospital São José, from where he sent information to the newspapers on the medical field, the Emergency casualties and everything else that was newsworthy. Perhaps because of this, Rui Anselmo was connected to the Lisbon Civil Hospitals from very early on, having entered as a clerk in 1942, having been successful in a public recruitment competition.

Consistently reaching the top of his field throughout his career, he held positions of leadership, joined various committees and working groups, by official appointment, and between 1947 and 1950, held the post of secretary of the then *Enfermeiro-Mór* (Chief of the Medical Services) Emilio Faro.

In 1957 he was awarded the silver medal for “exemplary behavior” and subsequently received many accolades for his interest in the profession.

His perpetual curiosity on the subjects related to



2001 – SPMI’s Homage. In the picture, the Health Secretary Correia de Campos and the Chairman of the Portuguese Society of Internal Medicine, Soares de Sousa.

medicine and hospitals, as well as the friendships he forged in the medical field, brought him into contact with various scientific societies, where he successively held positions of secretary for the Portuguese Society of Cardiology, the Portuguese Society of Endocrinology and the Portuguese Heart “Pacing” Association.

It was also these reasons, together with a fondness of writing, that led him to join several medical publications, such as the journal “O Médico”, and the “Boletim Clínico dos Hospitais Civis de Lisboa” [Clinical Journal of Lisbon Civil Hospitals]. His voluntary collaboration to the latter, as secretary to the editor, earned him another accolade, following his retirement in 1995, “for the spirit of committed contribution, competency and zeal that he demonstrated through his long career”.

Having summarized the essential stages of Mr. Anselmo’s career, it is time to go back and recall the history of the Portuguese Society of Internal Medicine where we had left it, i.e. on that afternoon in May 1983 when everyone seemed to agree on the urgent

need to it revive it.

The General Assembly convened ad hoc to admit as members all present Internists who met the “minimum career requirements”. The names of the managing boards were proposed and voted and it was decided to immediately contact Mr. Anselmo.

In fact, it was he who had in his possession, judiciously safeguarded, the remains of an abandoned association, forgotten for years, because its most illustrious members, skeptics regarding the future of Internal Medicine, had gone in search of other specialties born out of the fragmentation of the “common root”. Were it not for Mr. Anselmo, the Association’s past may have been lost forever. It was largely thanks to him that it became possible to put together the broken pieces and unearth the heritage, recover the memories and start rebuilding.

In the 18 years that followed, from 1983 to 2001, I was privileged, first as a member of the Board and then at the helm of the journal “Medicina Interna”, to benefit from his valuable collaboration. Those were decisive years for the SPMI, during which it reviewed its articles of association, created study groups, established international relations, acquired its first headquarters and began publishing the magazine. Always on hand, with his discreet presence and good-humor, Mr. Anselmo played a key part in achieving these ambitious goals.

Honesty, loyalty, and dedication to the work, were some of his greatest qualities. This is why it is often said of him: “People like him no longer exist.” Therefore, and for everything else that was said, the SPMI decided to give him a fitting and public homage as part of the commemorations of the 50th anniversary since it was first founded. And it is also the reason I leave here this modest and well-deserved testimonial, just “for the record”. ■