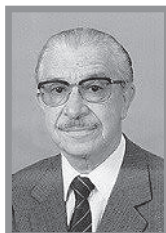

PROFESSOR JOFFRE MARCONDES DE REZENDE



João Carlos Pinto Dias¹ and Alejandro Luquetti Ostermayer²

(★ 1921, Piumhi/MG – † 2015, Goiânia/GO)

It was indeed an enormous loss, the recent passing of this man so dedicated to science, society, human welfare, and his family. His departure represents an enormous reason for mourning to his friends, relatives, and patients. Gentle, sensitive, precise, cooperative, hardworking, and scientifically rigorous, Prof. Joffre will be remembered as one of the most complete human beings of his generation. In medicine, he is unanimously regarded as a central figure in the history of digestive Chagas disease, often described as the “father” of megaesophagus and megacolon.

Originating from a traditional family in the Brazilian up-country, Prof. Joffre spent his youth in Minas Gerais, assimilating its classic regional values of human respect, solidarity, and modesty. At the same time, he continuously searched for ways of “seeing beyond the mountains.” Determined to make an old dream come true, he left home in 1944, bound for the historical home of Miguel Couto, Oswaldo Cruz, and Carlos Chagas: the National Medicine School in Rio de Janeiro. Recalling these days, he recently said the following³:

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3 Interview with the Memorial Foundation of the Medical School of the Federal University of Goiás, August 2013.

During my childhood, the figure of the general physician became very impressive to me, especially the family physicians working in the villages. I saw them as extremely dedicated but impotent, in those years when vaccines and antibiotics still did not exist. Nevertheless, their presence was anxiously awaited, as they brought comfort and hope to patients and their families. A family influence never existed, but every day I asked to myself why I should not also become a physician. The idea took root, developed, and became an obsession. It was a long journey to reach my ideal.

Facing a new world and countless challenges, he was accepted to the National Medicine School in 1945. With enormous enthusiasm and effort, he pursued his medical course, which was brilliantly concluded in 1950 when his first paper was published. Following exceptional masters such as Antonio da Silva Mello and Clementino Fraga, he soon became an excellent clinician in his own right, particularly devoted to gastroenterology. His medical career began in the public hospitals of Rio. A previous plan to work in Minas Gerais never came to fruition. At that time, unemployed and passionate about his dear Alzira (married in 1952), his dream was attained in the small municipality of Bela Vista (Mato Grosso state), where Joffre worked for two years as a general clinician. A main difficulty he faced during that time was communicating with the patients, who mainly spoke in the Guarani language. Back in Rio, he was invited by his faculty colleague Dr. Francisco Ludovico de Almeida to work in Goiânia, the new and prospering capital of the state of Goiás, where a medical school was being planned.

With an admirable investment in the future of the region, Francisco started to recruit young, idealistic, and qualified people, such as Joffre Rezende, to build a modern medicine in the center of Brazil. Arriving in Goiânia in 1954, he met his academic contemporary Anis Rassi, a brilliant cardiologist. Based on mutual confidence and respect, a rich and intense friendship developed naturally between them and remained solid for years to come. In particular, they were responsible for exceptional contributions to the modern history of Chagas disease.

Goiânia was enormously fruitful for Joffre, not only for his medical career but also his personal life. It was the city where he would spend the rest of his life with his beloved Alzira and where their four children would grow up. It was (and still is) a quiet and progressive place, full of spacious avenues and leafy trees, inhabited by a hardworking population, many of whom originated from the same Minas Gerais of Joffre's youth. Working hard in public hospitals and private clinics, he soon became one of the most renowned gastroenterologists in the state. By that time, his idealism and leadership had begun to bear much fruit. Among his several accomplishments, Joffre participated in the Medicine School foundation (1960), attaining multiple academic positions (such as vice director, department director, and full professor). He also created (in 1955) and directed for 35 years the *Revista Goiana de Medicina*,

was the first director of the Publishing House of the Federal University of Goiás (1978), founded the Goiás Academy of Medicine (1988), created the Brazilian Society for the History of Medicine (1997), and worked as director of the Municipal Health Department. Furthermore, he was a founder of the Brazilian Societies of Tropical Medicine and of History of Medicine.

Among his numerous prizes and awards, Joffre was recognized for his clinical and research work. He received several honors, including Professor Emeritus of the UFG (1991), Professor “Honoris Causa” at Brasilia University (in 2006, for his 28-year participation in research on tropical medicine), and the Brazilian and Minas Gerais Carlos Chagas medals, among others.

Prof. Joffre was loved by his students as a source of knowledge, a counselor, and a protector. His students often referred to him as their academic paranymp and put his name in the Academic Athletic Association. A member of 82 academic committees, he directed several postgraduate medical theses and stayed on as a volunteer teacher in the Medical School after his retirement in 1987. In his later years, he became a national reference in Medical Ethics and Medical Philology. From 1988 to 1998, he taught a course on the history of medicine at the UFG. Moreover, his personal library of medical and general dictionaries is considered one of the most complete in the country, and it also contains extremely rare and precious volumes of general Literature. Aiming to broaden his knowledge of the latter, he devoted much time to learning Greek and Latin. His books *Linguagem Médica* (now in its fourth edition), *Vertentes da Medicina*, and *A Sombra do Plátano* are extremely rich in history, philosophy, and medical knowledge. In addition, he had maintained a personal website (<http://usuarios.cultura.com.br/jmrezende>) since 2001 that covered his favorite topics: the history of medicine and medical language; the site had garnered more than 150,000 visits. From 1996 until several weeks before his passing, he contributed an admirable section on medical language to each issue of the *Journal Revista de Patologia Tropical*. In all his activities, Joffre Rezende proved to be very deep, honest, precise, and objective. As a physician, he achieved with perfection the Hippocratic maxims *dolores lenire, morbos arcere, and aegrotos sanare*.

Nearly every day he was at the teaching hospital, Joffre went to the endoscopy section. Obtaining a manometry apparatus from the Brazilian Research Council (CNPq), he was delighted to record the waves of the esophagus during endoscopies of chagasic patients. Dozens of gastroenterologists learned the art of endoscopy with him. He also measured the length and diameter of the colon on barium enema X-rays and bought a curvimeter for this purpose, spending hours collecting data. Joffre and his colleagues in the Radiology Department also developed a special method for barium enemas.

In his family life, he was an adored husband, father, and grandfather. Losing Alzira in 2001 caused him great suffering. He remained firmly and lovingly at her side throughout her disease. Joffre noted that close to the end, he showed her

the first volume of *Vertentes da Medicina* and told her, “Here it is finally, dear, our book.” With emotion, she smiled one last time and rested in his arms.

His major scientific contribution was in the area of Chagas disease. Megaesophagus was endemic in Goiás and neighboring areas. It was the widespread *mal de engasgo* (“choking injury”) already observed in several parts of Brazil by clinicians, surgeons, chroniclers, novelists, and travelers; however, it lacked a precise etiology. Departing from the classical Neiva and Penna descriptions of 1912, Carlos Chagas considered in 1916 the possibility that the condition could be related to American Trypanosomiasis. Nevertheless, there was speculation about other possible causes, such as B1 avitaminosis and congenital origins. Over a few years, Joffre and Anis collected 506 cases of megaesophagus, which were cardiologically and serologically studied. Most had cardiologic features similar to those found in Chagas heart disease. Well informed and creative, they compared the provenance of their patients with the geographical distribution of Chagas disease vectors in the region, finding an extremely coherent superposition. On the serologic side, more than 90% of the patients tested positive for *Trypanosoma cruzi* antibodies. Moreover, taking into account the contemporary epidemiologic, anatomopathological, and laboratorial studies conducted in Ribeirão Preto by Fritz Köberle and Pedreira de Freitas, interest in Chagas disease prompted long-term cooperation with that medical center, which included the exchange of anatomic pieces, sera, and epidemiological data. Prof. Rezende precisely systematized the clinical aspects, evolution, and prognosis of Brazilian endemic megaesophagus, defending with incontestable arguments its chagasic etiology. Simultaneously, hundreds of cases of megacolon, also endemic, were studied, as well as other gastroenterological disturbances (chiefly in the stomach and duodenum) having the same epidemiologic, anatomical, and pathologic characteristics (intramural autonomic denervation) as those found in megaesophagus. Publishing his data in several scientific journals, Joffre brilliantly defended the “digestive form” of Chagas disease at national and international congresses such as the National Congresses of Gastroenterology, the Medical Congresses of Brazil Central and Triângulo Mineiro, the International Congress on Chagas Disease (Rio de Janeiro, 1959), the Second World Congress of Gastroenterology (München, 1962), the International Symposium on Chagas Disease (Buenos Aires, 1972), and the International Symposium on New Approaches in American Trypanosomiasis Research (Belo Horizonte, 1975). During the centenary celebrations for Carlos Chagas’s discovery (2009), Joffre’s classic 1956 paper on megaesophagus was recognized as one of the most remarkable publications in the history of Chagas disease.

In summary, he published more than 80 scientific papers and 36 book chapters dealing with his observations and research on digestive Chagas disease. These works crossed various fields, such as epidemiology, clinical management, systematization, diagnosis, prognosis, surgery indications, historical aspects, and social determinants. In the history of Chagas disease, Prof. Joffre belongs to the

second generation of researchers, alongside Dias, Freitas, Laranja, Köberle, Lent, Romaña, Rosembaum, Brenner, Pifano, Prata, and others, who clarified the existence of the disease and made controlling it a priority. With an incomparable spirit of cooperation and integration, he collaborated and published with dozens of national and international researchers, including his dear son, Dr. Joffre Rezende Filho.

Established in 1976 at the Hospital das Clínicas, UFG, Joffre's special file on megaesophagus is probably the richest source of material on this subject, with more than 3,000 files. It has thus become a precious source for several medical theses. In 1977, a collaboration initiated by Joffre with Franklin Neva of the National Institutes for Health, Bethesda, gave rise to the Laboratory of Chagas Disease in the Hospital das Clínicas, UFG, today an international reference source for the diagnosis of this disease.

Aside from these activities, he happily participated in the Applied Meeting for Chagas Disease, first in Araxá (1984) and then in Uberaba (1989), where he organized the first such meeting in that city. His interest in the history of medicine led him to visit Greece in 1987 and 1996—specifically, the island of Kos—where Hippocrates lived. The second time, he participated in the 35th International Congress of the History of Medicine.

Above all, Joffre Rezende was a good man. In saying goodbye, we speak for hundreds of thousands of people who lived, and found better ways to live, because of him. Paraphrasing the great Brazilian writer Machado de Assis, our final feelings about him could be expressed as follows: ***“There is a greatness, a fearlessness, a glory in being simply good, without any pomp, any interest, any calculation; and, above all, with no regrets.”***

Rest in peace, dear Joffre, dear master, dear friend, unforgettable brother.

