Obituary

Jacques Mugica

Jacques Mugica passed away last December. One of the pioneers in cardiac pacing has disappeared from view but will remain with us forever in spirit.

He grew up in the Basque country, in Cambo les Bains where his parents owned a medical centre for pneumology and cardiology rehabilitation that Jacques continued for his whole life.

He was a medical student in 1955, and served as a physician officer cadet for the French army in North Africa during the Algerian war from 1959 to 1961. During that rather dark period, he learnt a sense of duty and what commanding soldiers means.

He graduated in medicine in Paris in 1965, and practised first pneumology, then was part of the first intensive care unit team in Europe at Lariboisiere Hospital in Paris, driven by his father-in-law, Professor Bouvrain. He had always been curious and enthusiastic about new technologies, and he found in cardiac pacing a new era and foresaw its development.

Thus, he soon practised at the private Val d’Or Centre, close to Paris, and started implanting pacemakers in 1966, being a pioneer in France. This centre became the largest in the world with more than 1000 implants in the early 1970s and, thus, Jacques rapidly acquired major expertise in the field.

In the following years, many doctors joined Jacques and they started participating in multiple investigations, writing more than 250 papers in the national and international literature, and more than 10 books. By the early 1990s, young electrophysiologists came to the Val d’Or (Philippe Ritter, Serge Cazeau, and Arnaud Lazarus) to take over his medical activity which he finally stopped in 1999.

But medicine was not enough for him, and by the late 1970s, he understood that training was of major importance for his young colleagues in this country and abroad inspiring the creation of Cardiostim. This meeting was dedicated to cardiac pacing, and, in 1980, included U.S. experts, such as Seymour Furman, Serge Barold, and many French doctors. His motivation was to train his colleagues in cardiac pacing, to help them to conceive the correct clinical and experimental investigations, and to learn to publish their results. Cardiostim started in 1978 with 250 participants in the western suburbs of Paris. In 2002, 5000 participants came from 70 countries. Jacques was always keen to maintain the tradition of friendship and collaboration between North America and France, and then between North America and Europe. Progressively, Cardiostim extended its activities to implantable cardioverter defibrillators, electrophysiology and pacing in heart failure.

He was terrific at work, being able to manage several tasks at the same time, shaking everyone, pushing the members of his medical staff. He did the same with the people from the industry, inciting engineers to develop new technologies, and explaining to marketing managers how much they could sometimes be wrong in their decisions!

His curiosity, his intelligence, his correct perception of the future led him to be at the origin of many aspects of cardiac pacing, such as lead technology, Holter functions, algorithms, rate-responsiveness and more recently multisite stimulation for heart failure.

I recall a patient being hospitalized at Val d’Or for end-stage heart failure in 1994. The patient was on a maximal drug regimen, he had a left bundle branch block and we realised at that time, that some kind of mechanical resynchronization could be beneficial to him. We were hesitating about performing this unknown procedure. We went to Jacques to get his advice and he said: ‘Don’t discuss further, do it, please do it, the patient is dying. If this is his last chance, please, give it to him. And don’t forget, the patient has to give away his daughter in marriage next month.’ We did it, the patient greatly improved and was able to accompany his daughter to the church for her wedding. After that, he understood the importance of this procedure, and really forced us to publish a case report!

This was the man, hard worker, enthusiastic about everything new, perceiving immediately the market share of the new techniques, and the way to fight the Ministry of Health to get reimbursement.

Although he got glory from his professional life, he was still able to receive people who were just coming to get his advice, sometimes about very personal affairs, listening to them with respect, and finally
providing help and support, just because he was a man.

He was very cultured, an art lover, analysing carefully the advances in the space industry as well as the latest archaeological expedition . . . When he was travelling, he always found time to visit an art museum, or an historical site.

We, his old fellows, have to pursue his mission. Jacques is with us in every decision, every phone call, every letter that is sent from the Cardiostim office. He is still observing our thoughts, our reactions. Undoubtedly, he will have his part in the programme of the coming Cardiostim meetings. Jacques, you will remain with us forever.

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