

In memoriam of Robert Pereira Martins (1925-2019): the architect of the Portuguese Rheumatology

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People and institutions are as noble as they don't ignore their past when they develop their future. Most of us, who live the present moment of an institution, don't recognize the amount of work and struggle that has been involved in the past for its assertion.

All this comes to our mind for the purpose of the life and work of Robert Pereira Martins, recently disappeared from among us. Robert Pereira Martins was one of the most brilliant Rheumatologists in the history of Portuguese Rheumatology, and surely the person who most worked, struggled and was more important in the birth of Rheumatology and its claim as an independent Medical Specialty in the Portuguese Medicine scenario.

Across United States and in other countries of Europe, Rheumatology was starting to be an important medical specialty since 1927 in the Mayo Clinic, and with the creation of ILAR (International League Against Rheumatism) in 1928. In Portugal it took about 20 years of delay for Rheumatology to start in 1948 at Instituto Português de Reumatologia (IPR) with the initial work carried out by Assunção Teixeira and Luis Pap. However, it is consensual that the main person in the creation of our specialty and in the design of its core set of objectives and values was in fact Robert Pereira Martins, which joined Assunção Teixeira in 1955 at IPR, where he worked until 2001.

In 1956, the first attempt for the creation of Rheumatology as a medical speciality was tried by a group of 33 physicians led by Robert Martins, with the support of the Presidents of many medical and scientific Portuguese societies (Sociedade de Ciências Médicas, Sociedade de Hidrologia and Sociedade Portuguesa de Ortopedia)¹. However, this first demand was refused by Ordem dos Médicos, with the argument that "at the moment the legalization of this new specialty is not opportune".

Robert Martins and his colleagues built a commission for the creation of the specialty of Rheumatology and worked for 13 years to achieve this objective. In 1970, they got the support from 1085 (of a universe of 8000) physicians of several specialities (including 95 professors of the Medical Schools) for the creation of the Rheumatology specialty. In January 1973 this process was concluded, but still awaited the approval from the Minister of Health. In 25/4/1976, Rheumatology was integrated as a medical hospital specialty and its *Curricula* included 2 years of Medicine, 3 years of Rheumatology and 1 year of other specialties (6 months Orthopaedics, 3 months Neurology and 3 months of Rehabilitation). Finally, in 5/7/1977 it was published in *Diário da República* the legal recognition of Rheumatology. It required 20 years, 7 of which of titanic work, with thousands of pages of reports and meetings, only possible because of the tenacity, fighting spirit and resilience of Robert Pereira Martins, in the coordination and leadership of the commission for the implementation of our speciality.

These are in fact the characteristics of Robert Pereira Martins' personality that made him unique in the Rheumatology and Portuguese Medicine panorama - his strategic vision, his determination and commitment to the causes in which he believed and for which he fought, his enormous capacity of work, and the quality, the detail and the depth that he put in all the projects in which he was involved. Finally, all this was allied to a warrior spirit, of unwavering will and of an unusual resilience and tenacity.

As a matter of fact, Robert Martins was much more than a tenacious and focused hard-working Rheumatologist. He was a man with a plan and a strategy, able to involve and lead other Rheumatologists in many achievements. In the 6th January 1972, the Sociedade Portuguesa de Reumatologia was created by seven rheumatologists including himself; in 1973, *Acta Reumatológica Portuguesa* and *Boletim Informativo da*

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2. President of the Board of Rheumatology of Ordem dos Médicos

SPR were all generated by the effort of several rheumatologists but with the presence and evident contribution and leadership of Robert Pereira Martins; in 4-7th April 1974, the first Portuguese Congress of Rheumatology was held in Coimbra, organised by him with João Figueirinhas and Mário Viana Queiroz. In the ARP supplement of the congress² we can find a remarkable paper by Robert Pereira Martins called “*A concept of Rheumatology organization in Portugal*” where the planning of our speciality and organization are clearly explained, and that demonstrates a strategic vision and an ability to anticipate a reality that is still current, only possible for a few remarkable man. In this paper Robert Martins asks 3 questions and gives us a 3 levels solution².

The questions remain still very valid and pertinent today:

Where and by whom should be done the medical treatment and rehabilitation of rheumatic patients (clinical level);

Who plans and coordinates the scientific studies, represents and defines the scope of Rheumatology (scientific level);

How to support the clinic and scientific structures proposed and how to mobilize society not only against the diseases but for the health in Rheumatology.

The solution would be a clinic structure in just a unique institution (because of costs and financing purposes) linked with the universities – the Portuguese Institute of Rheumatology; a scientific arm (Portuguese Society of Rheumatology) with a clear objective in post-graduate teaching of future rheumatologists but also of general practitioners; and a third organization, focused on the society and the awareness of rheumatic diseases by the population, created in 1982 and called “*Liga Portuguesa contra o Reumatismo*”, (renamed *Liga Portuguesa Contra as Doenças Reumáticas*), achieving finally the construction of the 3 pillars (Medical, Scientific and Social) of the Portuguese Rheumatology, imagined several years before.

To Robert Pereira Martins this 3 pillars of Rheumatology would act very closely, with a clear strategy, trying to involve universities, general practitioners, health centers, and public and private hospitals. The focus would be “to transform the rheumatic patient to a valid citizen or as valid as possible for his family and for society”. It is remarkable, as almost half a century after they were thought by Robert Pereira Martins, these premises remain valid in 2019, remaining the soul of our society and clinical activity.

In this life totally devoted to rheumatology and the rheumatic patients, Robert Pereira Martins has held all the positions necessary for the creation, implementation, expansion and recognition of Portuguese Rheumatology and Rheumatic Diseases, in the medical, scientific and social dimensions: he was President of Sociedade Portuguesa de Reumatologia, Editor of *Acta Reumatológica Portuguesa*, President of Colégio da Especialidade de Reumatologia da Ordem dos Médicos, President of Liga Portuguesa Contra o Reumatismo, and President of Secção Sul da Ordem dos Médicos (1980) (so far the only Rheumatologist to have this presidency, in which he was very active in the implementation of the residency in Rheumatology).

It is the memory of this remarkable Man, to whom Rheumatology owes so much, and that future generations of rheumatologists can never ignore, which we honor here today, with a sense of recognition and profound pride. Above all as a testimony of encouragement, example and motivation for all of us, in the sense of wielding today and in the future the banner created and defended by Robert Pereira Martins, and hoist Portuguese Rheumatology and Rheumatic Patients to the place they deserve in the Portuguese Society.

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