Dr. Adrián Kantrowitz, M.D.
(October 4th, 1918 – November 19th, 2008)

Dr. Adrián Kantrowitz will not be in the news for his biomedical developments any more. His constant struggle against the refractory heart failure to the medical treatment has recently come to its end.

From now on, newspapers, news magazines, scientific publications, and journals take his name and highlight the unquestionable merits of a teacher in surgery and biomedic research worldwide.

For two generations, Dr. Kantrowitz has always been news, and scientifically speaking, this means original contributions to the universal scientific knowledge because, as it is well known, the results of the scientific research have, among many others, the characteristic of being “something new”, “knowledge that have not certainly existed before”. That is, nothing less than a piece of news.

The fact of having performed the first cardiac transplant in United States in 1967, something that is probably not known in the region, is one of the outstanding achievements of this deceased great physician. Conversely, it is more frequent to find people who remember that the intra aortic balloon pump (IABP) counterpulsation used in human beings has been a Kantrowitz’s contribution. Moreover, this great physician liked to remember “his counterpulsation balloon’s birth” to assist heart failure. In a book, whose prologue happened to be written by René Favaloro, (1) the pioneer referred that he used this balloon in human beings on June 29th, 1967, after experimenting widely with diaphragm strips placed around the aorta and stimulated through the phrenic nerve. But let the creator bring us the past to the present, in his own words: “The patient was 45 years old and had had an acute posterior myocardial infarction. He was comatose, anuric, and in cardiogenic shock. Seven hours later, the balloon had restored the circulatory dynamics. A few days later, the patient was discharged” (Figure 1).

Dr. Kantrowitz’s achievements are not limited to the ones referred here, or the ones related to scientific discoveries, technological developments, or to the generation of biomedical technology, if we understand by technology the systematic reproduction of prototypes that have already gone through the experimental stage. Indeed, in 1983 he founded his own company of medical devices.

THE MESSAGE

We would do a tiny favor to the memory of a pioneer in scientific and technological research as Dr. Adrian Kantrowitz has been if, in order to honor him, we made a list of the achievements he has treasured. Someone who has dedicated more than sixty years to science has not done it to generate an interesting addition of discoveries and inventions; there is something deeper, and it is simply to have the conviction of putting “the method” of scientific and technological research into practice. There are circumstances in Kantrowitz’s life that should be taken into account very seriously, especially in a sector of the media in which a well-known epistemologist has recently expressed himself against the idolatry of the Argentine people (Mario Bunge, La Nación, May 2nd, 2008).

Dr. Kantrowitz’s achievements are the result of a research method, certainly successful, applied without a break, for which he earned more than twenty technological developments used in patients. The key to success is... do not give in! Indeed, there have been original ideas that did not pass through the experimental stage and that are still in the hypothesis stage; such is the case of the aorto-myoplasty that he performed and announced to the College of Surgeons in 1952. (2) In addition, some achievements might not have been recognized as Kantrowitz’s contributions, as is the case of the very same intra aortic balloon pump counterpulsation, which was used for the first time by Moulopoulos, but only in animals.

The idea of honoring with statues the big names who have died runs the risk of being forgotten as a historical event once the statue dissapears due to the passing of time. It is more productive and much more fair to pay tribute to the great pioneers in medicine by exploring their work. For that purpose, the physicians who explore the adventure of thought are the best option.
There is a lot to be done in the area of knowledge to which Kantrowitz dedicated his life, and the history is giving us a couple of very clear messages about this topic: one, that maybe men do not make history; the other, that maybe it is history what makes men. The thing is, precisely, that Adrian Kantrowitz has just died of heart failure. It has not been due to an accident or a neoplasia; it has been, paradoxically, due to the syndrome he faced with success so many times.

No doubt Adrián Kantrowitz’s life has also had much of adventure and rough times. Indeed, his great development has been the intra aortic balloon pump counterpulsation, which was developed in Maimonides Hospital of New York. After the scientific demonstration, and due to its sounding success, he decided, among the most outstanding exponents, to carry out a multicenter study. The consensual protocol was approved by nine centers of excellence, but there was a tenth one that decided not to carry it out: the “Research Committee at Maimonides Hospital”. This was the reason why all the group moved to the Sinai Hospital in Detroit, in June 1970.

In science, it is inevitable to connect the past to the future. This continuous dynamics does not let us hold up in definitive laws or in absolute bans. Because, in essence, a law is about banning. However, to evade from this ban must be a creed for the scientist.

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