

## Commentary

The main interest of this study lies on the one hand in the desire to obtain a prognostic orientation on the basis of the natural history of a disease, and in the effort to try to find out the cause of the disease on the other.

Nowadays, Ignacio Ponseti is well-known for his method for the treatment of clubfoot, widely used and highly commended by pediatric orthopedic surgeons. But it should be remembered that he was deeply interested in imparting his great knowledge to his colleagues, especially as regards the natural history of the different orthopedic processes as a basis for a better therapeutic indication. In our country he participated actively in the memorable courses organized by another of our classics, Miguel Ferrer Torrelles, where Dr. Ponseti was always in charge of such topics as clubfoot, scoliosis and femoral head epiphysiodesis.

In *Study on idiopathic scoliosis* he draws on the natural evolution of almost 400 unoperated cases of idiopathic scoliosis. Many of these patients were treated with postural exercises and physical therapy and some success was achieved in terms of postural correction. Nowadays, it has not been demonstrated that postural treatment and physical therapy actually work, which has led to a significant reduction in their indication and to the understanding that they do not play a major role in the natural history of idiopathic scoliosis. No great advances have been made recently in this field and physical therapy is occasionally indicated due to a gen-

eralized unawareness of its efficiency or as a placebo not to give the patient the idea that nothing can be done.

Another interesting part of the study (taking into account its date of publication) is the experimental attempt to investigate the etiology of scoliosis. If they did so by inducing lathyrism in the experimental animals, this was due to the fact that lathyrism was a relatively frequent cause of neurologic disorders of the central nervous system in certain areas of Spain. Lathyrism was considered to be caused by the intake of grass peas (*Lathyrus sativus*) that was eaten in some of the poorer regions of Spain in the post-war period.

Thus, the condition was attributed to some neurological potentially paralyzing phenomenon, and Studies carried out since then, especially those by Cañadell and Beguiristain at the University of Navarre, have followed a similar line. At any rate, these studies have exposed the intimate mechanisms that participate in the development of deformities caused by alterations of the neurocentral cartilage rather than the potential alterations that induce them.

This means that over 50 years later idiopathic scoliosis is still idiopathic and its evolution rather unpredictable.

C. Villas Tomé, M.D.

*Department of Orthopedic and Trauma Surgery. University Clinic.  
School of Medicine. University of Navarre. Pamplona.*