



# INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL REVIEW ON DOWN'S SYNDROME

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## EDITORIAL

**Dr. Valentine Dmitriev**

**La Dra. Valentine Dmitriev**

**M. Trueta**

*Chair of the FCSd Board of Trustees*

Dr. Valentine Dmitriev, pioneer in infant and early education, has passed and left us the orphans of an outstanding person and a close personal friend.

Dr. Dimitriev (Val) was born in Shanghai, China, of Russian parents who fled from Saint Petersburg at the height of the Bolshevik revolution and spent a few years in Vancouver (Canada) before settling in Seattle, USA. After a B. A she earned a Ph.D in Early Childhood, and Special Education, and was the author of numerous professional articles, and seven books on parenting and education and child development. After her retirement she published four romantic novels.

As a member of the academic staff of Washington University, for 32 years of her life she worked with both typically developing as well as with developmentally disabled infants. In 1972 she founded an innovative educational program designed to promote the mental and physical development of young children with Down syndrome (DS) and help the parents.

As a pioneer in infant learning she developed her Model Preschool Program which was so successful that the University of Washington and Dr. Dmitriev received national recognition and her program was replicated in more than 40 states. Dr. Dmitriev visited 11 countries including Catalonia. She was a consultant to public schools, teachers and parents.

I personally discovered the Child Development and Mental Retardation Center's Experimental Education Unit at the University of Washington in 1974. Having refused to accept the totally negative prognosis as to my son's future, I wrote asking for help and she answered immediately that she would send me programs to follow at home and that I should never again say that "my son will have limits, as if you think this then you are already limiting him". This

advice made an impact on me that I have remembered all my life.

The programs sent to me were a great help to all the family. They were simple and specific, and I had the good fortune to find an enthusiastic young girl who came to live with us and put the programs into practice regularly. At that time all the family joined in. It was games to play together with many games promoting language, and coordination. We played together and it was a thrill to experience his happiness and astonishing progress. It was not long before I had the opportunity to travel to Seattle personally, which is when I had the pleasure of meeting Val and creating a friendship that has lasted until her sad passing.

In Seattle with Val I was able to attend a seminar and visit the preschool program with all the learning babies. I came home full of enthusiasm, loaded with slides and cassettes that a nephew helped me translate into Catalan and Spanish. I very soon decided that I could not keep all this information to myself and wanted to help other parents and their children. So I began touring the country with the good information. It was not long before I realized that this information had to be given by professionals to professionals and parents. That is when I decided to invite first Dr. Dmitriev, and later Pat Olwein so that in 2 years they personally gave 5 seminars for professionals and parents in Barcelona.

Together with a group of parents and professionals, in 1984 we founded the "Fundació Catalana Síndrome de Down". At the time, our program of early intervention was acknowledged by the University of Washington, and we were able to help many parents and their children, and progressively increase services and programs to fit their needs as they grew older.

Now that my son is 42 years old, living independently with his stable partner is happy and earning his own living in the offices of a Savings Bank, dedicating his spare time to helping others like him and lecturing on his special subject of Human Rights, speaking to parents and advising them to "have confidence" in their sons and daughters, and I remember the negative prognosis when he was born and I think of Val and how much I owe her for having given me confidence and strength when I needed in most.

Looking back I think how grateful I am because thanks to Val, I not only helped my son and hopefully many others, but I helped my family, and with her programs, above all, I was able to help MYSELF. Thanks to her and my husband's support, I was able to face the challenge and look ahead with optimism.

Thank you Val. As long as I live, you shall be with me.