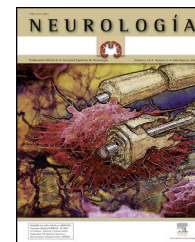




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IN MEMORIAM

Maribel Forcadas Berdusán[☆]



Professor Maribel Forcadas Berdusán (1949–2012) died on 14 June at Hospital de Cruces, the scene of her life's work, after having struggled so valiantly against a malignant neoplasm for several years.

Born in Uncastillo, where her father was a rural doctor, and raised in Zaragoza, Maribel – as she preferred to be called – displayed all of the virtues of the people of Aragon. When she finished medical school, she too worked briefly as a rural doctor, and spoke of what she had learnt then with both pride and gratitude. In 1975, she joined Hospital de Cruces as a resident specialising in neurophysiology under Dr Pedro Madoz, and also in neurology in the new unit which I had started just a few years before. From that point on, our professional lives were closely linked. After completing her basic neurology programme, she studied in Bordeaux under Professor

Loiseau, the well-known epilepsy specialist. Her doctoral thesis addressed the clinical, neurophysiological, and neuropathological features of an exceptional series of patients with both insomnia and hallucinations caused by lesions of the pontine tegmentum. After more than 10 years as a lecturer, she successfully completed the competitive exam for promotion to full professor in 1995. Some time later, using any means available and with no official support, we formed a team with Dr Madoz to create the video-EEG monitoring unit for patients with epilepsy. Maribel's involvement and determination were crucial to transforming our initial vision into a well-structured and equipped unit that would serve as the backbone of the Basque Country Health Service's medical/surgical epilepsy programme, the regional programme of reference which even receives patients from other areas. Professor Forcadas was appointed clinical chief, and despite the well-known challenges of coordinating multidisciplinary tasks in hospitals, she demonstrated exemplary leadership in the programme which had grown to include adult and paediatric neurologists, neurosurgeons, neurophysiologists, neuroradiologists, neuropsychologists, and specialists in nuclear medicine. Professor Forcadas knew how to gain the trust and cooperation of everyone on board, and they were drawn by her scientific authority, enthusiasm, honesty, and her insistence on placing the patient's well-being above any other matters of personal gain.

The same ability to work with others and seek common objectives led her to serve as a board member of both the Spanish Society of Neurology (SEN) and the Neurology Society of the Basque Country. She was a very active member of the SEN's study group on epilepsy, and participated in all of its educational and scientific events. Her main contributions and publications were derived from her clinical experience in the field of epilepsy, and particularly from the results delivered by the surgical programme at Hospital de Cruces. She was especially proud of the monograph *Epilepsia y Mujer* [Epilepsy in Women], and produced 2 editions of the book in conjunction with her best friends in epilepsy research.

Despite her intense dedication to the area of epilepsy, Maribel never lost contact with general neurology. Against

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all odds, she continued attending consults, and her competence and dedication were perceived by patients of all types. She grew as fond of her patients as they were of her, and constantly received tokens of their appreciation and gratitude. Her overarching view of neurology, her commitment to the service which she viewed as her own, and her cordial treatment of both doctors and support staff made Maribel a pivotal figure in the service and my right hand for more than 30 years.

But during these years, I also watched Maribel grow as a person. From the somewhat revolutionary phase in her youth in the last days of Franco's dictatorship, when she was on the verge of going to the barricades to defend liberty, justice, and women's rights, she evolved into a mature and centred woman, happily married to our colleague Dr José Larracochea and with two adored children,

María and Juan. But this transformation did not entail the loss of any of her outstanding characteristics, nor did she betray a single one of her youthful ideals. She was unable to tolerate injustice or nepotism, continued to rise up against the oppression of women, and refused to turn a blind eye to mediocrity or incompetence among professionals. I have known few people with such a firm sense of personal dignity, so loath to engage in deception, or with such a pure concept of friendship. For all of these reasons, so many of us will mourn her absence and cherish her memory forever.

J.J. Zarranz
Servicio de Neurología, Hospital de Cruces, Bilbao, Spain

E-mail address:

JUANJOSE.ZARRANZIMIRIZALDU@Osakidetza.Net