Rethinking the Instituto de Oncología Luis Razetti

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"For many of us here, this has been our home, our dear old home."


In 1936 the world was recovering from the devastation of World War I and, unknowing, would behoove between 1939 and 1945 suffer the most brutal armed conflict in history, World War II. On the other hand, science was overturned during that period, in large part, to help the development of weapons of mass destruction and care of the thousands of injured survivors of the war, abandoning in an alarming way, the cancer research. Between the years of 1918-1970, the fledgling fighting cancer took shape through research on the possible causes and treatment options. Hypothesis varied as those based on the relationship with carcinogenic substances such as tobacco, viral as the based on Peyton Roux jobs in avian sarcoma and Zur Hausen in HPV, among others, did see that probably a joint effort between a State, the scientific community and pharmaceutical companies could effectively cope with the disease through prevention, early diagnosis and timely treatment. On August 5, 1937, following a general trend in Europe led by the Institut Gustave Roussy in France and the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, the U.S. Congress enacted the founding of National Cancer Institute, considered one of the most important government agencies dedicated to oncology worldwide. During the same period in our thriving Latin America, happily oblivious to the armed conflicts of the time, wakes up the same concern: to organize a struggle state-funded against cancer, in centers going beyond just
holding terminally ill patients. For 1922 highlights the work of Dr. Angel Roffo in front of the Institute of Experimental Medicine in Buenos Aires (now Angel Roffo Cancer Institute), the Municipal Hospital of Oncology Marie Curie in Buenos Aires (1931), the Cancer Registry in Mexico (1940) and numerous other similar institutes in Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Chile, etc..

In Venezuela in 1929 is founded the Laboratory of Physical and Radium therapy, which, as argued Rodriguez Griman et al (1), was the first official attempt to support the fight against cancer. For 1936, General Eleazar Lopez Contreras in the Presidency of the Republic decrees the July 5th in 1936, the creation of the Instituto Anticanceroso Luis Razetti (now Instituto de Oncología Luis Razetti), in a house located on Avenida San Martin, counting the time with 60 inpatient beds. In 1954 during the tenure of General Pérez Jiménez, works began to expand the San Martin Avenue and ordered the transfer of patients to the Hospital Algodonal and the demolition of the original headquarters of the institute. Dr. Ravelo Celis during the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the institute, told us that as a resident of the surgery department, was tasked to transfer some patients hospitalized in his own vehicle, before the final order of the president to demolish the institute in just hours to make way for the modern avenue, set to open in the Semana de la Patria, with the special envoy of General Juan Domingo Peron, president of Argentina. During the 1954-1956 operates temporarily in the Algodonal and comes to occupy, since 1956 until today, the former headquarters of the Escuela Nacional de Enfermería (ENE) listed in San Jose de Cotiza, on a green hill at the foot of Avila in the northwest of Caracas. This beautiful building designed and built in 1938 by architect Luis Eduardo Chataing, son of famous architect Alejandro Chataing, was designed to house the Asylum at Caracas, a function that was never fulfilled, as it was designated as the seat of the ENE for more than one decade.

El Instituto de Oncología Luis Razetti de Caracas is a facility that has provided in its 77 years, specialist care for cancer patients, especially those from deprived social classes. He has served tens of specialists in the fields of surgical oncology, internal medicine oncology, pediatrics, urology, oncology
nursing, palliative care and social work. It offers specialized courses in mastology and gynecologic oncology and also receives at least 100 trainees per year in the areas of urology, gynecology, mastology, plastic surgery, oral and digestive tract from many hospitals in Venezuela. In fact, by the physical dimensions of our institute, its intense and efficient academic and healthcare activity, has become one of the most active medical schools to graduate and one of the most important hospitals in our country. In 2012, with all the limitations that have been emerging, the IOLR attended patients from all Venezuela, performing more than 60,000 specialized consultations, 2160 surgeries, 34,098 radiotherapy sessions, and more than 350,000 radiology and laboratory studies (2). Today it also has a Pediatric Oncology Ophthalmology Centre and the first public consultation in the country of Fertility in Oncology inside Gynecologic Oncology Service.

Despite these favorable data, it is time to rethink our institute, starting from the model of care and academic to physical infrastructure and equipment. The model of institute that we had undoubtedly has given his best, but for the times to come its approach must necessarily evolve towards a new conception. The lack of investment planned, care staff wage demands and the lack of a clear idea as to its permanence by the authorities, have placed it in a situation of concern. A situation, which after the impressive damage suffered because of the trough of 1999, probably is the most severe in its history. Those of us trained in the institute, we are convinced that thanks to the invaluable trust of our patients, experience and generosity of our teachers and strong sense of belonging to all the staff, without exception, we can say that the Instituto de Oncología Luis Razetti is a fundamental part of the historical, scientific, teaching and healthcare of Venezuela and as such it should be preserved. The proposal to rethink our institute is an invitation to all, to launch a comprehensive rescue of our headquarters and our sense of permanence to the formation of the desired and necessary Instituto Nacional de Oncología, with the participation of all, and demanding from our health authorities the attention the first institute of oncology of Venezuela and one of the first on the continent deserves. The future of our beloved institute can
not be solely on a decision that does not take into account the views of those who proudly are part of it, the patients and their workers.

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References:

2) Departamento de Registros Médicos del Instituto de Oncología Luis Razetti, 2012.