

APPRECIATION

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It is a pleasure for me and for all who know and love Sir Ludwig Guttmann to take part in celebrating his eighteenth birthday.

The work of this man in the comprehensive rehabilitation of the spinal injured patient is so great and so well known all over the world that I feel it is not necessary to say more here, and indeed many others will do so with more precise and beautiful words. I would prefer to express my personal feelings towards a man who has been for me an example to follow—for his tremendous knowledge, his overwhelming personality, his devotion to work and his continuous support towards his pupils and staff.

It is true that he was always very strict with his staff, it is also true that many times we shuddered when he discovered a faulty examination or a deficiency in our work, but he is always very humane, capable of understanding the failures of his staff and always ready to stand up for them. I will always remember that one of the main pieces of advice that he gave to me when I was leaving to be in charge of the National Paraplegic Centre at Toledo was that I should always have the door of my office open and be ready to see any member of my staff, regardless of their status, and without a previous appointment.

His personality influenced me to stay with him and direct my interest towards the medical specialty of paraplegia.

During my period with him at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, he undertook the task of teaching me the essentials of the comprehensive management of spinal injured patients. Whether he succeeded or not it was certainly not his fault, and I am today a very grateful and loving pupil. When I returned to Spain I did my best to spread the 'Gospel' in my country, and had the opportunity to open and run three Spinal Units, one of them the National Paraplegic Centre at Toledo, perhaps the biggest and most modern Centre in Europe, which was built and organised under the expert advice of Sir Ludwig Guttmann, specially invited by the Spanish Government. In these Centres, and in The Guttmann Institute under the leadership of my good friend Miguel Sarrias, many Spanish doctors have become familiar with the principles set out by Sir Ludwig.

Every year I look forward to attending the Annual Meeting of the International Medical Society of Paraplegia, not only for pure scientific reasons, but to have the opportunity of having even brief personal discussions with my mentor and friend. Even in retirement he is as busy as ever.