

OBITUARY

Obituary for Jose Luis Pico, MD



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“Friendship is a virtue”

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,
Firenze, Italia
Year 1486

Jose Luis Pico, a good friend of mine, passed away on July 30th surrounded by his family and “*ma peine est profonde (Paul Verlaine)*”.

Jose Luis Pico, MD initiated the hematopoietic stem cell transplant program in the Institute Gustave Roussy in 1980 and became its director in 1990. He was thus one of the pioneers of the transplant adventure in France.

But Jose Luis was much more than that.

Jose Luis was born 82 years ago in Montevideo, Uruguay, to where his grandfather migrated from Toscana towards the end of the 19th century. He performed his medical studies in Montevideo and graduated major of his fellowship promotion. This allowed him to receive a grant to continue his training in France in 1973. He joined the program directed by Georges Mathé at the Paul-Brousse Hospital where this giant in hematology introduced him to immunotherapy and transplantation. During these years he concomitantly held positions at the French Atomic Agency Commission and at the “Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale” (INSERM). During his two decades of passionate work at the Institute Gustave Roussy, not only did he establish an active transplant program for the sake of patients, but he was also scientifically dynamic in the field, contributing to nearly 200 peer reviewed publications. During these years he also mentored numerous foreign visitors. In 2000 he left this Institute for new challenges in the biopharmaceutical industry, initially with Amgen Ltd, at Thousand Oaks, California and then in Cambridge, UK to become the director of the European development in onco-hematology. Finally, he joined some of his old friends as Medical Director of Metabolism at the creation of the Cell Therapies Research & Services (CTRS) laboratory, a newly funded French laboratory specializing in drug accessibility for orphan diseases, before retiring in Nice.

The initial objective of Jose Luis was not to stay in France but to go back to Uruguay to participate in hematology development. Unfortunately, in the mid 70’s the political situation in his country prevented him doing this. His wife and two small children managed to join him in France, and he started a new life and career in his new country. However, he never forgot Uruguay and was one the leading contributor of the productive and still active collaboration in hematology between his two countries. Notably he energetically participated in the creation of the transplant program in Hospital Maciel, Montevideo. In 2019, as a recognition of his contribution, he was invited to attend the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the alliance between Hospital Maciel, Montevideo and Institut Paoli Calmettes, Marseille, an alliance that has made the Uruguayan program one of the leading ones in South America.

As well as being a wonderful and passionate doctor, Jose Luis was a courteous man. It is a natural Uruguayan characteristic but probably amplified by his Toscanan inheritance. He also placed family love and friendship above all, and we are many who have benefited from his kindness and generosity. His ancestry may also have contributed to this quality, brightly highlighted in the short quote from Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, that I started with. You should be aware that it is a strong familial conviction that Jose Luis Pico may be an heir of this philosopher who lived in the center of Italy during the 15th century and developed humanist ideas at this time. Knowing Jose Luis, let me tell you that I would not be surprised if it was true.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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