

Profile

Sharing Marco Tulio Medina

"With the vicissitudes of life, neither riches nor wisdom are everything; it is the joy of sharing that is the greatest treasure"

Marco Medina (translated from Spanish)

His little poem sums him up: no profilee ever shared with me so much information so usefully listed, so thoroughly prepared, *con tanta alegría* ("done so joyfully" you might best say in English), or with such a palpably genuine pleasure in meeting someone new—*con simpatía* ("with open friendliness" may be the closest you can get). Meet Marco Medina, professor, neurologist, researcher, inventor, educator, World Federation of Neurology Regional Director for Latin America, and *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*, among many other things—but above all, and best of all, sharer.

Medina's story weaves in and out of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, where he was born in 1959. After graduating in medicine from the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), he moved to the Institute of Neurology and Neurosurgery in Mexico City to continue studying clinical neurology, after which he joined the Centre Saint Paul and University of Aix-Marseille in France to train in clinical neurophysiology. He later did his postdoctoral training in paediatric and adult epilepsy at University College Los Angeles in the USA. But Medina always had Honduras on his mind. "I always dreamt of returning so that I could help people with neurological problems here in my country", he tells me. And his alma mater UNAH is where he is now professor of neurology and neuroscience.

Medina believes education is the finest thing a person can aspire to and that, once you have it, no one can take it away from you. But you can share it with others, and he has been doing that via his position as the co-founder and founding president of the Pan-American Federation of Neurological Societies, and as co-founder of the Neurology Training Programme at UNAH, a role that has seen him mentor roughly half of all Honduran-trained neurologists. It will come as no surprise to hear that he also co-founded the Latin American Academy of Epilepsy. "Educating others is a duty that those of us fortunate enough to have much-needed knowledge should not shirk", he says. "There is much honour in being someone's teacher, and in the act of teaching both the giver and the receiver grow."

Medina has shared his time too, supporting the initiation of the Honduran Epilepsy Foundation and the Honduran Multiple Sclerosis Association, patient groups in which information, help, and hope are shared in turn. And via Honduras Global, a non-profit organisation he also co-founded, he hopes to link outstanding researchers among the Honduran diaspora to form a knowledge network

that will promote scientific and business development in the country. "Honduras has problems that can only be overcome by fundamental changes in equality, transparency, justice, social peace, and an improvement in the economic conditions of its people", he insists. "Perhaps via this network we can help bring home ideas that will lead to innovation and new possibilities that will ultimately improve people's lives."

Medina, of course, has shared his research results with all of us, making contributions to our knowledge of the genetics of epilepsy (he and his collaborators have identified various epilepsy genes and mutations), neuroepidemiology (with the creation of the Honduran Neurology Training Program), stroke, neurocysticercosis (particularly reducing epilepsy via community interventions), Zika virus (describing sensory polyneuropathy associated with this new infection), and most recently COVID-19. (Here, Medina stops for a moment to remember Jesús Américo Reyes, who he describes as his great mentor during his university days and who recently died from the latter disease.) It was for contributions to science like these that Medina was awarded the *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* from President Macron of France on Sept 3, 2018.

And what of those riches in his little poem not being everything? Certainly, Medina finds other treasure in donating half the royalties from his patent on epilepsy diagnosis to the UNAH, helping to support its research activities.

With all this work, you might think that Medina would have no time left to see patients; yet, he holds clinics 4 days a week at the Brain Research Center in Tepeyac, Tegucigalpa, although, in these pandemic days in particular, "I am using telemedicine", he tells me, "with the support of my son, also called Marco, a young medical doctor". He even finds time for reading and writing a little poetry.

Medina shares one last thing with me: his love for Tegucigalpa. Having heard of its problems of gang culture and crime, I eventually dare to ask if it is as dangerous as its reputation suggests. "You know", he says, "I have lived in Mexico City, which has many dangers, in Marseille, home of the French Connection, in Los Angeles during the terrifying 1992 riots, and I have seen racially motivated assault in London. I think Tegucigalpa has two sides to her face too, one happy, the other a darker, less pleasant one, and everyone's experience is different. I at least walked to school every day, and then to university, sometimes returning late at night or early in the morning, with nothing much to report. Tegucigalpa is my home, and it's here where I will end my days." But not before sharing a lot more of himself, I'll bet.

Adrian Burton



For more on the **Pan-American Federation of Neurological Societies** see <https://pafns-neurology.org/>

For more on the **Honduran Epilepsy Foundation** see <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Charity-Organization/Fundaci%C3%B3n-Hondure%C3%B1a-de-Epilepsia-1398370603627187/>

For more on the **Honduran Multiple Sclerosis Association** see <https://www.facebook.com/asohemhn/>

For more on **Honduras Global** see <http://hondurasglobal.org/en/>

For more on the **epilepsy genetics work** see *Neurology* 2008; **70**: 2137–44

For more on the **Honduran Neurology Training Program** see *J Neurol Sci* 2007; **253**: 7–17

For more on the **neurocysticercosis research** see *Epilepsia* 2011; **52**: 1177–85

For more on the work on **Zika virus** see *J Neurol Sci* 2016; **369**: 271–72

For more on the **COVID-19 research** see *N Engl J Med* 2021; **384**: 497–511