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Juan Manuel Taveras, 1919–2002

Michael S. Huckman

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Juan Manuel Taveras, 1919–2002

Michael S. Huckman, MD, Editor Emeritus

Juan M. Taveras, MD, Professor Emeritus at the Harvard Medical School and Radiologist-in-Chief Emeritus of the Massachusetts General Hospital, died in his native Dominican Republic on March 28, 2002. His death marks the passing of a dominant force in the establishment and advancement of the specialty of neuroradiology. His landmark innovations in training, investigation, radiologic administration, and professional organization had global impact, not only on neuroradiology but on the broader spectrum of radiology and the neurosciences in North America and throughout the world.

Juan was born in Moca, the Dominican Republic, on September 27, 1919, the son of Marcos M. and Ana L. Taveras. His father was a schoolteacher, and because Juan was an excellent student, he frequently served as a tutor for other students in his classroom. He was given music lessons, and as a teenager played clarinet in a dance band. Later, as a medical student, he worked his way through school playing clarinet, saxophone, and flute in orchestras and jazz bands.

He received MD degrees from the University of Santo Domingo in 1943 and from the University of Pennsylvania in 1949. After completing a radiology residency under the direction of Dr. Arthur Finkelstein at the Graduate Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, he joined the staff of Dr. Ross Golden at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York. In 1952, he and Dr. Golden co-authored *Roentgenology of the Abdomen*.

That same year, Juan was appointed Director of Radiology at the Neurologic Institute of New York. Although he was known as a gastrointestinal radiologist, his background as a superb anatomist suited him well for the job. In North America at that time, it was virtually unheard of for a radiologist to perform neuroradiologic procedures; such procedures were being performed by neurosurgeons. Because neuroradiology was better established in Europe, and especially in Scandinavia, many North American radiologists went to such centers as Stockholm and Oslo to learn the techniques of cerebral arteriography.

Juan was determined to revolutionize the practice of neuroradiology at his institution. New equipment was developed to improve the quality of examinations, including a gargantuan apparatus for pneumoencephalography devised by Juan and his colleague, Dr. Gordon Potts. Juan established the first National Institutes of Health-funded fellowship program in neuroradiology and in 1956 inaugurated what was to become the longest continuously running annual postgraduate course in neuroradiology, one that continues to this day. With tact and demonstrated exper-

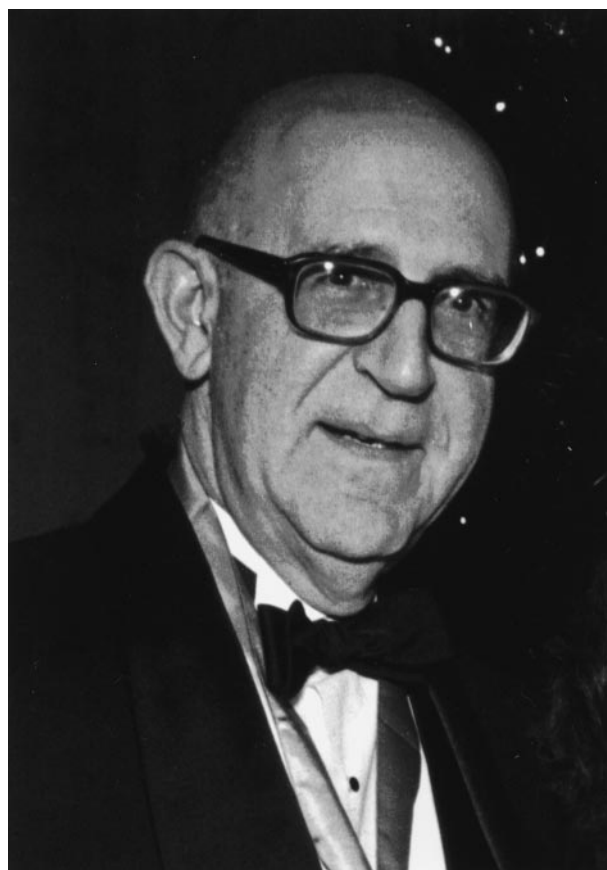


FIG 1. Juan M. Taveras, M.D.

tise, the role of the neuroradiologist gradually increased, and by the time Juan left New York 13 years later, all neuroradiologic procedures at the Neurologic Institute were performed and interpreted by neuroradiologists. He showed that neuroradiologists could perform the procedures safely and interpret them accurately, and he brought to light that subspecialization was essential for better patient care, research, teaching, and the ultimate development of all of diagnostic radiology.

He co-authored, with Dr. Ernest Wood, the first English language textbook of neuroradiology (Taveras JM, Wood EH. *Diagnostic Neuroradiology*. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins; 1964), which included techniques of performance and interpretation of myelograms, arteriograms, and pneumoencephalograms. It became the standard textbook for a generation of American radiologists, neurologists, and neurosurgeons.

In 1962, Juan organized a dinner meeting at Keen's Chop House in New York, inviting 14 neuroradiolo-

FIG 2. In 1987, Dr. Taveras' former neuroradiology colleagues and fellows honored him at a gala dinner in Chicago on the occasion of his retirement as Chairman of the Department of Radiology at the Massachusetts General Hospital.



gists from all over North America. This resulted in the founding of the American Society of Neuroradiology, for which he served as first President. At the Vith Symposium Neuroradiologicum in Rome in 1960, Juan and his colleagues had impressed the Europeans with the quality of work being accomplished in North America. He was selected to preside over the VIIth Symposium Neuroradiologicum, held in New York in 1964, the first in North America. That same year, he became the first radiologist to serve on the Neurologic Sciences Training Committee of the National Institute of Neurologic Diseases and Blindness.

In 1965, with his reputation well established, Juan was appointed Professor and Chairman of Radiology and Director of the Edward Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. During his 6-year tenure there, he built a languishing department into a major center for modern practice, training, and investigation in diagnostic radiology, radiation oncology, and nuclear medicine. He attracted trainees and scientists from all over the globe and produced many of radiology's future leaders. Not only did he manage to upgrade to the finest equipment, but he was meticulous about radiographic technique and, with Armand Diaz, his technical administrator, developed a cadre of technicians whose services were coveted by other institutions. Although he was chair of the department, he made a point of reading neuroradiology films two or three afternoons a week. In addition to his radiologic acumen, he was well versed in clinical neurology and taught his fellows to report radiologic examinations in a manner that answered the clinicians' questions.

In 1971, Juan succeeded Dr. Laurence Robbins as Professor of Radiology at Harvard Medical School and Radiologist-in-Chief at the Massachusetts General Hospital. During his 17-year tenure, he applied his magic to building a department with cutting-edge equipment and operational systems that attracted and

trained the elite investigators in the radiologic sciences. Upon his becoming Professor Emeritus in 1988, Harvard created the Juan M. Taveras Chair in Diagnostic Radiology to be occupied by the Chair of the Department of Radiology at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Despite his retirement as Chairman (Fig 2), Juan continued active practice and teaching at that institution and added practices in Mexico City and Santo Domingo, traveling to those places almost monthly.

Throughout his career, Juan had an innate sense of where the future of radiology led, and he was quick to incorporate new technologies into his operations, including hypocycloidal tomography, CT, positron emission tomography, ultrasonography, and MR imaging. His departments pioneered in all those areas. He saw the future of radiology in organ-oriented subspecialization, and he advocated that radiologists be not only imagers but procedurally oriented physicians. He was a staunch and early advocate of subspecialty certification and passed the examination for the Certificate of Added Qualification in Neuroradiology at the age of 76!

Juan wrote almost 250 scientific articles and numerous textbooks that became classics for neuroradiologists and physicians in allied disciplines. As Founding Editor of the *American Journal of Neuroradiology*, he made the publication the outstanding journal in its field, which in turn added to the prestige of the American Society of Neuroradiology.

A complete list of his society memberships, offices, committee appointments, and honorary memberships in learned societies is too lengthy to enumerate herein. However, some of the more important ones deserve mention. In 1972, Juan was recipient of the Knight of the Order of Duarte Sanchez y Mella award, the highest civilian award of the Dominican Republic. Among his many gold medals are those of the Radiologic Society of North America, The American Roentgen Ray Society, The American College of



FIG 3. In 1996, Dr. Taveras developed the Centro de Diagnóstico, Medicina Avanzada, Laboratorio y Telemedicina in Santo Domingo.

Radiology, and The Association of University Radiologists. In 1995, he received the first Gold Medal of the American Society of Neuroradiology. He received honorary degrees from Harvard University and from the Universidad Nacional Pedro Henriquez Ureña and the Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra in the Dominican Republic.

Juan's wife of 43 years, Berenice, died in 1990. They had been married in Philadelphia in 1947. In 1991, he married Mariana Margarita Bucher (Margot). Together, they continued to share many interests outside his work. They traveled extensively, and Juan, returning to his love of music, briefly flirted with the production of a musical based on the life of Porfirio Rubirosa. Juan was a patron of the opera in Boston, and he also enjoyed bullfighting and baseball. He always admonished his younger colleagues to "keep active and keep working," and he heeded his own advice up to the last few months of his life. He loved a party and the company of friends and was seen dancing the night away at the most recent Radiologic Society of North America's president's dinner in December of 2001.

Juan was proud to be a citizen of the United States, but he never forgot the needs of his native country. In 1988, he became a founding member and founding president of the Sociedad Ibero-latino Americana de Neuroradiología Diagnóstica y Terapéutica. Through the Fundación Dr. Juan M. Taveras Rodríguez and Juan's tireless efforts, he was the impetus behind the development of the La Plaza de Salud in Santo Domingo and later developed its Centro de Diagnóstico, Medicina Avanzada, Laboratorio y Telemedicina (Fig 3), a state-of-the-art medical clinic for diagnosis and treatment dedicated to providing access to the highest quality medical services for the people of the Dominican Republic. The center now provides full diagnostic services and has become one of the major centers for medical education in Latin America. Organizing the clinic and raising funds to support it became a major activity for Juan and Margot.

Although most of his acquaintances did not know of it, Juan was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in 1998. He underwent chemotherapy but never com-

pletely stopped working. In January 2002, he was named to the Order of St. Gregory, a Papal honor bestowed upon individuals who have served the Catholic Church or who have distinguished themselves by their accomplishments benefitting society. By February, his disease had advanced significantly, and in early March, realizing his illness was terminal, he requested that Margot take him to his beloved Santo Domingo. While there, he rejoiced in learning of the many milestone events taking place at the Centro de Diagnóstico, Medicina Avanzada, Laboratorio y



FIG 4. Juan and his wife Margot (Mariana Margarita Bucher) on the occasion of his 80th birthday in September 1999.

Telemedicina. His health continued to deteriorate, and he received the last rites of the Church from Nicolas de Jesus Cardinal Lopez Rodriguez, Archbishop of Santo Domingo.

On March 27, 2002, Juan slipped into a coma and died the next morning. He was buried in Cristo Redentor Cemetery in Santo Domingo. His funeral was attended by many local dignitaries, and eulogies were delivered by his son, stepson, and several medical colleagues.

Dr. Taveras was a national hero in the Dominican Republic, and his death sparked banner headlines, lengthy articles, and photographs in the newspapers in Santo Domingo referring to him as the "principal spirit behind the Plaza de la Salud, whose premises bear his name." One editorial stated that "his death is an irreparable loss to medicine and Dominican society but is alleviated by the valuable legacy of his deeds, which put access to highly specialized medical services within reach of the poor." A letter to Margot from Joaquin Balaguer, former President of the Dominican Republic, said that "Dr. Taveras' death was not only a loss to medical science but also a loss to his country, which owes so much to his intelligence and entrepreneurial spirit."

Juan lived a meaningful and active life to the end, putting his personal magnetism at the disposal of

many good causes. It is interesting to speculate regarding whether, without his efforts, there would have been subspecialization in radiology, whether radiologists would have performed invasive procedures, and whether there would have been an American Society of Neuroradiology, an *American Journal of Neuroradiology*, a Certificate of Added Qualification in Neuroradiology, a Sociedad Iberolatino Americana de Neuroradiologia Diagnostica y Terapeutica, an international reputation for American neuroradiology, National Institutes of Health fellowships in neuroradiology, or modern health care in the Dominican Republic.

Juan has left a wonderful legacy to Margot (Fig 4) and his children, Angela Forbes Summers, Louisa Helen Taveras Koranda, and Dr. Jeffrey Taveras. He set examples that all physicians in academic medicine and private practice would do well to follow. He was a master organizer, scholar, investigator, teacher, editor, diplomat, and role model for the physicians he trained. His loyalty to his profession, his institutions, his professional organizations, his trainees, and his family and friends was without question. Although his life was filled with well-deserved honors, he wore them humbly. It will be many years before neuroradiology throughout the world will be so influenced by the career of one person.