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Robert M. Quencer

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Orlando Ortiz: Eighth President of the American Society of Spine Radiology

On May 13, 2002, Orlando Ortiz took his place as the eighth President of the American Society of Spine Radiology (ASSR) during the annual meeting of the American Society of Neuroradiology in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The story of how Orlando reached his current level of leadership, both nationally and within his own community, is a story of America in a microcosm.

Born in Puerto Rico, Orlando was brought to New York City along with his brother and sister when he was 2 years old. The family settled into housing in the back of a grocery store in the Bronx while his mother worked long and hard as the sole breadwinner to support the family. It should go without saying that his mother, Ana Delia, has been the major influence in his life.

Orlando's earliest contact with medicine was a very personal one: a ruptured appendix when he was a youngster. He was successfully operated on by his family doctor and over the years developed a close relationship with that physician. He entered Columbia University as an undergraduate in 1977 and majored in biophysics and neuropsychology, solidifying even further his interest in the biologic sciences—the neurosciences in particular. What influenced him most at Columbia was the spirit of intellectual curiosity that permeated the Columbia campus, the core curriculum in the humanities and arts, and his major in physiological psychology, which allowed him to focus on behavior and the brain.

Orlando then went on to Harvard Medical School. It was the radiologic-pathologic correlations that took place on a regular basis during the pathophysiology part of the curriculum that attracted him to the field of radiology. As an elective during medical school, he spent time in interventional radiology at Cornell University where he was involved in research with angioplasty balloon catheters. Orlando graduated from medical school in 1985.

Orlando returned to the New York City area for his internship in internal medicine (Winthrop-University Hospital) and for his radiology residency at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New Hyde Park, finishing the program there in 1990 where he was strongly mentored by Joseph Zito who instilled in him even further an interest in neuroradiology. With that training under his belt and with his deep interest in the neurosciences dating back to his undergraduate days at Columbia, Orlando moved westward to the Neurological Institute of New York City (only to a New Yorker would a move from Long Island to Washington Heights constitute a “western migration”). There, under the direction of Sadek Hillal, Orlando completed a 1-year fellowship in neuroradiology and experienced what many

others who went through that same program felt: “the best education of my life.” Dr. Hillal's inventiveness and unique approaches to imaging and intervention left an indelible mark on Orlando, explaining, at least in part, his continuing push for new and better techniques in interventional neuroradiology.

Orlando was subsequently recruited by the University of West Virginia to build up its neuroradiology section. He remained in Morgantown for 5 years, serving as Chief of Diagnostic and Interventional Neuroradiology. During that time, he found time to obtain his Master of Business Administration degree from the University of West Virginia. The desire to return home to New York City remained ever present, so in 1997, Orlando accepted a position as a staff neuroradiologist at Winthrop Hospital where he has remained ever since, except for a 1-year stint at the University of Maryland.

Currently Chairman of Radiology and Chief of Radiologic Services at Winthrop Hospital, Orlando oversees a busy clinical department and a radiology residency program of 12 house officers. He enjoys being chairman, which is understandable considering his outgoing and cheerful personality and his enthusiasm for radiology. Orlando and his wife, Cecelia, live in Garden City and have four children (Alexander, Maria, Raquel, and Esteban), ranging in ages from 4 to 11. A busy household, for sure, but Orlando still finds time to play touch football and basketball, to run, and to dance (the salsa is his favorite).

Although he has been author or co-author of a number of articles, published in both the radiology and non-radiology literature, Orlando considers his most significant contribution to our field to be the CD that he, along with Greg Zoarski, produced on vertebroplasty. It is a comprehensive, well-illustrated CD that should be used as a starting point for all those interested in becoming involved in this important procedure.

As President of the ASSR, Orlando wants to develop a mentoring program between experienced neuro-radiologists, residents, and fellows. He conceives of this program as interinstitutional, so that house officers from one program can take advantage of the expertise of attendings at another institution. Surely, this is an interesting concept. He also wants to develop a more robust ASSR web site and, by so doing, stimulate more research and projects in spine imaging and intervention.

With such forward thinking and under Orlando's leadership, the ASSR will continue its remarkable growth.

ROBERT M. QUENCER
Editor-in-Chief