

Profiles in Cardiology

This section edited by J. Willis Hurst, M.D., and W. Bruce Fye, M.D., M.A.

Mario R. García-Palmieri

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Dr. Mario R. García-Palmieri is truly an exceptional person, whose remarkable career in medicine and cardiology has spanned almost five decades. During that time, he has served in many roles: physician, teacher, scientist, public servant, academic leader, professional organization leader, mentor, wise counselor, newspaper columnist, board member, trustee, role model, husband and father, and all of them with distinction.

Dr. García was born in the rural town of Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, on August 2, 1927. He received his initial education there, but his father, a school teacher, moved the family to Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, as the school system in Adjuntas provided education only until the first year of high school. His scholarship was evident early, and he graduated valedictorian of both his elementary and high school classes in Aguadilla. His high school accomplishments included gold medals in mathematics, chemistry, physics, history, French, and Spanish.

Supported by scholarships, Dr. García obtained a B.S. degree, magna cum laude, from the University of Puerto Rico in 1947, and then an M.D. degree from the University of Maryland School of Medicine in 1951. He then trained in internal medicine and cardiology, the latter as a National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute Fellow in Cardiology at the School of Medicine at the University of Puerto Rico/the San Juan City Hospital. With completion of his training, he directed the Department of Medicine of the Fajardo District Hospital from

1955 to 1956, after which he joined the School of Medicine of the University of Puerto Rico as a full-time academic with an appointment as Associate in Medicine. His academic career quickly blossomed, and he was rapidly promoted to Assistant Professor of Medicine in 1958, to Associate Professor of Medicine in 1960, and to Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine and Chief of the Section of Cardiology in 1961. He then served for 35 years as Head of the Department of Medicine of the School of Medicine of the University of Puerto Rico. He is still Head of the Adult Cardiology Section and Director of the AGCME-accredited postgraduate training program in cardiology at the University of Puerto Rico. In 1984, the title Distinguished Professor of the University of Puerto Rico was added to his academic achievements. Under his leadership, the Department of Internal Medicine was approved for training in 11 postgraduate specialties and became recognized for its excellence in clinical care. During this leadership tenure, he was involved in the training of over 4,000 medical students, 400 residents in internal medicine, and 100 postdoctoral trainees in cardiology. What makes this all the more impressive is that this was and still is accomplished in an environment that required Dr. García-Palmieri's special abilities to make it happen, to wit—not only has Dr. García-Palmieri been the guiding spirit of the program, but he also set and maintained standards of excellence under difficult circumstances that required his people skills to meld the two different cultures (Hispanic and American) and to surmount the political forces that are part of university life in Puerto Rico. And he did all this as one of the few full-time clinical faculty in the School of Medicine.

During this time, Dr. García-Palmieri also led several important epidemiologic and clinical studies supported by the NIH/NHLBI, including the Puerto Rican Heart Health Program, the Coronary Drug Project, the Aspirin-Myocardial Infarction Study, Metabolic Studies in Tropical Sprue and other Diseases, Studies of the Epidemiology of Coronary Artery Disease, the Cooperative Study of Drugs in Coronary Artery Disease, the Prevention of Events with Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitor Therapy (PEACE) study, the Omapatrilat versus Enalapril Randomized Trial of

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Received: October 23, 2003

Accepted: October 27, 2003



FIG. 1 Mario R. García-Palmieri, M.D.

Utility in Reducing Events (OVERTURE) study, and the Atrial Fibrillation-Congestive Heart Failure (AF-CHF) study, the latter two still ongoing. His publications from these and other studies include over 160 scientific publications, as well as six books.

That his influence as a respected academician, cardiologist, teacher, public servant, and wise counselor go beyond the University of Puerto Rico is amply evident. He has served on two presidential commissions, one appointed by President Richard Nixon, the other by President Jimmy Carter. He has served twice as President of the InterAmerican Society of Cardiology, was a member of the Board of Governors of the American Board of Internal Medicine, was President of the International Society and Federation of Cardiology, has served as Secretary of Health of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and has been an active member of more than 20 professional societies.

Probably unique to Dr. García-Palmieri has been his seminal involvement in the teaching of cardiology, both on a personal level and through local institutions and societies in Central and South America. In fact, his influence in cardiology in this part of the world has served as an important bridge between the North Americans and the Central and South Americans. Another unique role of Dr. García-Palmieri is his teaching of cardiac disorders and other health concerns to the

general population in Puerto Rico. He has done this through his regular health column in *El Nuevo Dia*, the major Spanish newspaper in Puerto Rico, which is read by virtually everyone on the entire island.

As one might expect, there has been much recognition of Dr. García-Palmieri's achievements and stature among his peers in the international cardiology community. He received the International Achievement Award of the American Heart Association in 1980 and the Master of the American College of Physicians Award in 1984. He was a visiting Fulbright Scholar in Central America in 1986. He received the Distinguished Service Award of the American College of Cardiology in 1989 and the Honor and Gold Key Award of the Medical Alumni Association of the University of Maryland for the most distinguished alumnus in 1991. He received the Special Achievement Award of the Puerto Rico Chapter of the American College of Physicians in 1999 and was a recipient of the Outstanding Alumnus in Natural Sciences Award of the University of Puerto Rico in 2001. In fact, his curriculum vitae contains eight pages of awards, including honorary membership in 14 medical societies, numerous decorations from governments in Central and South America, and dedications of local meetings to him. The University of Puerto Rico has established the Mario R. García-Palmieri endowed chair since 1996, and the main lecture of the InterAmerican Congress of Cardiology held every two years bears his name.

He is a great champion of the island of Puerto Rico and its long and rich heritage and culture. This has included supporting and advancing the awareness of Puerto Rican folk art, particularly the wood carvings by Puerto Rican artisans of the Three Kings and the Birds of Puerto Rico. He has been an avid collector of these wood carvings for many years, which, in part, led to a book about one of the great bird carving artisans in Puerto Rico. And with all this, he has been a wonderful husband to Raffy and a devoted father to Maria Mercedes, who is a practicing internist and endocrinologist.

In short, Dr. García-Palmieri is a man for all seasons. He is a person of many interests and talents, a gifted clinician, an articulate teacher, a productive clinical investigator, a supporter of educational activities for trainees in cardiology locally and abroad, a very able administrator, an example of excellence and commitment to public service with an integrity of the highest caliber, a supporter of Puerto Rican culture, and a teacher of teachers. He has shared all these attributes with his peers and fellow workers with grace and humility.