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The School of the Golden Years

Memories of 1950s Sorocaba and the birth of its Faculty of Medicine

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ABSTRACT

The author, a graduate of the first class of the Faculty of Medicine of Sorocaba, recovers the 'story' of the institution on its fiftieth anniversary, complementing the history already documented. He reconstructs the Sorocaba of the 1950s: a city of tropeiro origins, with trams, civil guards, clubs, bohemia and an active political life, yet lacking university teaching. He describes the precarious medical and sanitary landscape of the time, with incipient use of antibiotics, disease outbreaks, few hospital beds and limited specialties, along with indicators of low life expectancy and high infant mortality. The text argues that the arrival of the faculty accelerated the development of regional medical care, and it recounts the bold episode in which Gualberto Moreira and Father André Pieroni approached President Dutra to obtain the authorization to operate, granted in 1950.

KEYWORDS: *faculty of medicine of sorocaba; history of medicine; sorocaba; medical education; memoir; 1950s*

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The Faculty of Medicine of Sorocaba was born of the people of Sorocaba who dared to dream and managed to trade their dreams for a goal, one that was reached and surpassed. The history of our faculty has already been very well told and documented by Dr. Hely Felisberto Carneiro in his book "A Faculdade de Medicina de Sorocaba e os 50 Anos de sua história" (The Faculty of Medicine of Sorocaba and the 50 Years of its History).

With the history already told, and having been invited to write about the Faculty of Medicine of Sorocaba on its fiftieth anniversary, we are left to tell the *story*. Do not judge us nostalgic. Nostalgia always drives us to believe that the good times belong to the past. There are no "good old days"... there are only different realities.

Sorocaba, in the 1950s, was a large city, yet it retained the simplicity and informality characteristic of the interior of São Paulo, features heightened by its origins as a

stopover for the tropeiros (mule drivers). It was large in the number of its inhabitants, in the wealth it generated, and in its social infrastructure. A city of industries (which generated jobs and wealth) and of schools (which allowed for the education and formation of its youth), it lacked university-level teaching. While its medical school was being dreamed of, conceived and born, the trams circulated drowsily from Rua dos Morros to Cerrado; the civil guards, in their blue uniforms, looked after order and traffic; cold cuts and dairy products were bought at Merceria Jacomino, one got a shave and a haircut at Salão Telles, and people debated the introduction of the "English week", the pasteurization of milk and local politics. The newspapers covered subjects such as the results of the examinations at the Ginásio Estadual (the state high school, "Estadão"), the meetings and transcripts of the Rotary Club lectures, and the opening of the Banco do Estado de São Paulo on Rua Monsenhor João Soares. Our people cheered the victories of its sons: Prof. Arthur Fonseca, ranked third in the state entrance examination for secondary school teaching; the Sorocaba basketball "five" (as the newspapers wrote), with Campineiro, Paschoalick, Sete Belo, Didi and Alonso, practically

unbeatable in the interior of São Paulo; Nilson Ferreira Leão, called up to the São Paulo state swimming team and later crowned Pan-American champion and record holder. Praça Cel. Fernando Prestes was the stage for the young people's "footing" (evening promenade). Other clubs may have been livelier, but the city's most stately one was the Sorocaba Clube. On bohemian nights, in the fashionable bars, one could hear the tuneful, well-projected voice of Ireno Hanser, the voice and chords of Luiz Violão, or the violin of Vicente Centenário. The newspapers dealt with all these subjects, as well as with local politics and its conflicts. Though placid, our city was never politically inert; parties banned by the circumstances of the time used to influence and decide elections.

From a medical and sanitary standpoint, the years were not so golden. The use of antibiotics was still incipient and costly; the newspapers ran advertisements from companies offering to import penicillin, streptomycin and dihydrostreptomycin. They also carried appeals to public charity for the purchase of these antibiotics for poor tuberculosis patients. They frequently reported campaigns run by local organizations to acquire medicines and supplies for the Tuberculosis Hospital. The health services were constantly grappling with the proliferation of mosquitoes, provoking vehement protests; the horror of the yellow fever of the early century and of the malaria that raged until the 1940s remained alive in the memory of Sorocaba, the latter having even caused the death of one of its most illustrious mayors (Quinzinho de Barros). Dirty lots and deficient basic sanitation did not make Sorocaba any different from most cities in the interior of São Paulo at that time.

For its 110,000 inhabitants, the city had 430 beds across its 4 general hospitals. The construction of the Santa Lucinda hospital, donated by the Votorantim Industries, would add 100 beds that would serve medical teaching. Physicians of good technical standing, including notable surgeons, worked in their private practices and in the IAPs (the social security institutes). Some of them would go on to join the faculty's teaching staff. Specialties were few, limited to ophthalmology-otorhinolaryngology, dermatology, pediatrics, cardiology, phthysiology, radiology and clinical analysis. Orthopedics, like gynecology-obstetrics, was usually practiced by the surgeons. Anesthesia was administered by the nuns and/or nursing staff. Whenever possible, local anesthesia or spinal anesthesia was used, applied by the surgeons themselves. Transfusions, carried out according to the blood types of the Landsteiner classification, were performed directly from donor to recipient, using the concept of the universal donor. Half a century later, one might infer that this limiting picture of medical care would have been overcome by the natural evolution

of the medical profession. The conclusion seems obvious to us, but we have one certainty: the arrival of a faculty in Sorocaba hastened this kind of development. Anesthesia, the Blood Bank, Orthopedics, Thoracic Surgery, Pediatric Surgery, Anatomical Pathology and other specialties were established at the same pace as the corresponding chairs came into operation at the Faculty.

Life expectancy for anyone born here was 55 years, and the proportional mortality ratio, which measures deaths of people over 50, was 28% (practically half the proportional mortality ratio of the state capital). Infant mortality, today between 15 and 20 per thousand live births, must have been around 100 or more per thousand. In the neighboring cities the situation was worse: a large share of the municipalities in the southern region of the State of São Paulo had neither a hospital nor a resident physician. We believe that, alongside the idealism of its founders, this observation constituted a strong argument in the choice of Sorocaba as the seat of a medical school. It was thought that bringing the medical course to the interior would naturally result in bringing professionals to the interior as well. Studies had not yet appeared showing that infant mortality varied more with the presence of a bank branch than with the presence of a physician in the community. As an aside, on March 18 the Banespa branch also celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its activity in our city.

To conclude, on April 4, 1950, the headline of the *Cruzeiro do Sul* proclaimed: "President Dutra has granted authorization for the Faculty of Medicine of Sorocaba to open this very year." The news had been given to Mayor Gualberto Moreira by Dr. Novelli Jr., a federal deputy from Itu connected to President Dutra's family. What the newspapers do not tell: this endorsement from the President was obtained through a bold move by Gualberto Moreira and Father André Pieroni.

While handling the matter at the Ministry of Education, they learned that if President Dutra agreed, the faculty would come off the drawing board. They kept watch near the Catete Palace, sleeping in a taxi from the small hours of the morning. When the early-rising Marshal Dutra came out for his morning walk, he was approached. Those were golden years of peace and democracy, but the security guards who would have prevented a civilian from approaching never suspected that that black cassock, coming toward them, would have the audacity to approach the President and hand him the documents relating to the operation of our Faculty.

Despite the authorization, the Faculty of Medicine only began operating the following year... but that is already another story.