CULTURA & SAÚDE

ISSN 2595-7546
Vol. 4 · No. 3 · August 2004
São Paulo, Brasil

ARTICLE · CULTURA & SAÚDE

Dr. Vital Brasil Mineiro da Campanha

The scientist who created the first antivenoms and founded the Butantan Institute

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Received for publication in August 2004 · Section: Article · Language: English

ABSTRACT

The author sketches a biographical profile of Vital Brasil Mineiro da Campanha, born in 1865 in Campanha, Minas Gerais, and trained in medicine in Rio de Janeiro in 1891. He recounts his dedication to science, to the point of contracting bubonic plague and yellow fever, and his specialization in Paris alongside figures such as Metchnikoff and Roux. He highlights that, on returning to Brazil, struck by the deaths caused by snakebites, Vital Brasil devoted himself to the study of ophidism and, in 1898, prepared the first effective antivenoms against Crotalus and Bothrops venoms. He mentions the creation of the Butantan Institute, formally established in 1901 under his direction, and the founding, in 1919, of the Vital Brasil Institute in Niterói. He also records his written works, the medical vocation of his six children, and his death in 1950, at the age of 85, as one of the greatest Brazilian scientists.

KEYWORDS: *vital brasil; ophidism; antivenom; butantan institute; history of medicine; brazilian science*

Born in April 1865 in Campanha, Minas Gerais, Vital Brasil Mineiro da Campanha worked hard to be able to study medicine, graduating in 1891 from the Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro.

He devoted himself to science with such zeal that he even contracted bubonic plague and yellow fever in the course of his work.

Upon graduating, he left for France, where he specialized in Paris in laboratory studies under professors Mesnil, Metchnikoff, Borel and Roux.

On returning to Brazil, he was appalled by the number of lives lost to snakebites and began to study the subject, dedicating all his energies to it. In 1898, at the Bacteriological Institute of São Paulo, he prepared the first effective antivenoms against the venoms of *Crotalus* and *Bothrops* snakes. The following year, Adolpho Lutz suggested to the government the creation of a serum-therapy institute, which became the Butantan Institute, formally established in 1901 and directed by Vital Brasil.

In 1919, he moved to Niterói, where he founded the Institute of Hygiene, Serum Therapy and Veterinary Medicine, today the Vital Brasil Institute.

Of his six children, all devoted themselves to medicine and research. One of them, following his father's example, died of an infection contracted while carrying out research on streptococci.

Several of his works stand out, such as *O ofidismo no Brasil* (1906) and *A defesa contra o ofidismo* (1911).

He died in May 1950, at the age of 85, as one of the greatest Brazilian scientists. And, on becoming immortal, his name was "Brazilianized": from Dr. Vital Brazil, he came to be called Dr. Vital Brasil.

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