In small groups, this model would take the form of an authoritarian chief who centralizes power and leads the group. The authority and benefits pertaining to this leader’s position would depend on his or her ability to maintain the status quo. It is easier for chiefs to defend their position when conflicts arise because they are surrounded by a group of peers who are essentially powerless. In such a situation, an expert like Machiavelli would advise fomenting intrigues among the peers to keep them from conspiring against the leader while fostering their social and economic dependence. This is a social structure consistent with the need to defend one’s own position and it is frequently associated with a territorial concession.

The Modern World-Contemporary Society

The transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern World was driven by the development of commerce and the rise of the bourgeoisie, among other factors. First, absolute monarchs emerged who circumscribed the power of the nobles and, in the process, suppressed hostilities between them. This development led to a marked increase in social and economic development. It also obliged the nobles to...
join the royal court and forced them to adopt more civilized
codes of behavior in which negotiation and an appreciation
of the intentions and desires of other parties were
fundamental to progress.

At a later stage, these courts gradually evolved towards
more parliamentary forms. Through more or less violent
means, the power of kings was either abolished or reduced
to a merely symbolic and moderating role, and democracies
emerged in France, England, and the United States of
America. This was the beginning of the modern era, a
period during which the privileges of the social estates have
disappeared and the social base of political decision making
has been broadened. The political power of the individual
is no longer something intrinsic to the person, but rather
a result of the delegation of power by others.

In small groups, the counterpart of this process of
distribution of power would be groups of peers with a
more widely distributed hierarchical structure in which
functions are delegated to a number of deputies. This
organizational model makes it more difficult for the chief
to maintain his or her position in situations of instability,
whether the destabilizing influence is internal or external
to the group. This type of group structure favors
 collaboration and openness towards other groups with
similar aims.

In the Mediterranean region, and in Spain in particular,
the transition to the structures typical of the Modern
World occurred later than in other places. This may be
one of the reasons for the more fervent adoption in this
area of the model of behavior of the nobility as a social
ideal. Consequently an indifference to work and a
rejection of punctuality as a sign of both individual
freedom and a carefree attitude took on positive
connotations.

The Social Structure of Dermatology

We can all find examples in our own context of both types
of organization and have some fun identifying historical
parallels. All forms of organization have their advantages
and disadvantages. Which serves best to defend us against
the intentions of our employers? Which would you prefer
if you were the boss? And if you were an underling?
Nevertheless, the ease with which we can find similarities
between the structures we observe in our own world and
those of medieval society is surprising.

The Social Structure of Other
Specialties

Not all medical specialties have the same social structure,
and a variety of factors have probably contributed to the
differences that exist. The structure of the university has
its roots in the Middle Ages, and to a certain degree it
reflects this history. For this reason, it seems to us quite
probable that specialties such as dermatology, which
developed in a university context, tend to have a more
hierarchical organization than specialties that developed in
the context of the national health system.

Conflicts Within the World of
Dermatology Seen From This
Perspective

On the broader scale, disputes are generally the result of
struggles for territory or power. In such contexts, the feudal
model is more likely to lead to conflict because territorial
disputes are more intense and it is more difficult to gain
power through consensus.

On the smaller scale, the reasons for instability are
similar. In practice, group leaders generally face 2 problems
in their jobs. The first of these is deciding whether to
recruit brilliant members to their group and stimulate
their professional development or whether to favor loyalty
and submission. The other dilemma is whether to
encourage group members to actively express their opinions
or to silence discordant voices. The way the leader deals
with these dilemmas usually depends on the type of social
model adopted.2

All of us play roles that fit into some kind of model
depending on the circumstances. But the model applied in
modern contemporary society has been more productive
and has brought about greater social progress. The forces
that drove the transition from the Middle Ages to the
Modern World are also present in our environment: the
rise of the dermatological bourgeoisie and business interests,
the increase in the number of free agents (emigrants,
independent agents, a loosening of the ties of fealty), and
the greater availability of work. There are also signs in our
time that mimic the changes that characterized that earlier
transition: local chiefs have been losing power, which has
shifted away from them to inaccessible higher echelons or
political structures, leaving them only a minimal role in the
affairs of court.

But the most important change is still pending, to wit,
the abolition of the privileges attached to position and
the broadening of the social base of power. There are
several drawbacks associated with the persistence of
medieval forms of organization. Firstly, it is a system that
gives rise to sterile territorial disputes and power struggles.
Furthermore, if we bear in mind the historical parallels,
the real struggle in today’s world is between the absolute
monarchs (the new powers that exercise control over
dermatologists and their superiors) and the emerging
bourgeoisie (the great mass of dermatologists). In this
situation, the “privileged classes” act as a defensive bulwark that supports the absolute monarchy. As a result of the position enjoyed by the members of this privileged subgroup, confrontation with the absolute monarchs is viewed with displeasure and skepticism by a part of the group. It is difficult to tell whether the goal of the confrontation with the powers that be is a desirable increase in the political weight of the bourgeoisie or merely the defense of the interests of certain privileged elements. The historical parallel is so striking that it is our view that the changes described above are inevitable. We hope that these reflections will enable all of us to adopt a less skeptical attitude towards the conflicts and will favor the inevitable transition towards a dermatology profession with a contemporary social model based on peer relationships.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Diego García Doval for his comments and to José Ramón Rodríguez for the first reference and his comments.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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