HISTORY

Urología Clinica, bulletin of the Urology Service of Dr. Sánchez Covisa of the Hospital Provincial of Madrid, edited between 1928 and 1936

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Abstract

Objective: To make known the important urological work by Sanchez Covisa, third chief of the Urology Service of the Hospital Provincial de Madrid, who beginning in 1928 was able to transform and convert it into possibly the most outstanding one of its time in Spain, comparable to the best hospitals in foreign countries.

Material and methods: We have analyzed the contents of the publication Urología Clinica, which collect the changes introduced and the work carried out in such service between 1928 and 1936, reflected in a careful yearly statistics on the care, operations and mortality in addition to the articles published by the members of the Service together with a short bibliographic review of each one.

Results: In 1914, he became chief of the Service, and after 14 years, was able to overcome all the obstacles and to extend and modernize the surgery rooms, hospitalization wards and examination resources. In 1931, once the changes were made, he began important clinical and scientific activity, and constituted one of the principal urological schools of the first half of the 20th century in our country.

Conclusions: The prestige reached by the Urology Unit of the Hospital Provincial of Madrid attracted patients from all over Spain, many of them treated or operated on in their place of origin. This explains why the condition was complicated with some acceptable results. The quality and honesty of the Urology unit justify its qualification. The works in general are mere reviews and those regarding surgery of the uretero-intestinal shunt stand out.

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Introduction

The Hospital General de Madrid was founded in 1587 by order of Philip II and with the approval of Pope Pius V, of the grouping of several small health facilities and hospitals scattered throughout Madrid. They were gathered, initially, at the Hospital de Santa Catalina, which was called Hospital General de Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación y San Roque, facing the present Palacio de las Cortes. In 1596, by order of Philip III, it moved to the Albergue de Mendigos, built on the esparto field of the southern area of the city. In 1603, Ferdinand VI ordered the construction of a new General Hospital at the end of the Atocha street, which, started in 1758, opened unfinished in 1781 during the reign of Charles III. Ferdinand VI approved the creation of the first Association of Surgeons of Spain, the Real de San Fernando, very short-lived, which was located in the General Hospital, later, in 1787, the Real Colegio de Cirugía de San Carlos settled on its ground floor.

Since 1849, the center has been governed and administered by the Provincial Council and was renamed as Provincial Hospital. It was the second hospital in the country to have a Department of Urology, thanks to the doctor and provincial deputy Dr. Pulido Fernández, who with his Regulations of the Medical-Pharmaceutical corps of Charity of the Provincial Hospitals of Madrid, approved on 15th July 1889, managed the disintegration of General Surgery with the separation of the different branches of surgical specialties, among which was that of the urinary tract. It also facilitated that the teaching ability was given to these centers, as well as the awarding of specialist diploma to the doctors trained there.\textsuperscript{1-3}

The first person in charge of performing genitourinary assistance was Alfredo Rodríguez Viforcos (Aravaca [Madrid], 1854–1903). He had studied Medicine at the Colegio de San Carlos, where he graduated in 1875, and in 1882, after obtaining a position as a surgeon by means of a competitive examination at the Hospital, he was appointed to the care of patients with ‘diseases of the urinary system’ because of his interest or special dedication to this disease. He excelled at his surgical skill and was appointed head of the Department following its creation in 1889. After his death, Antonio Piqueras Bravo (Madrid, 1856–1914), who entered the center thanks to a competitive examination in 1880, succeeded him as the head in 1904. Excellent clinician and experienced surgeon, completely devoted to his profession, he excelled at the treatment of wounds by bull horn. He was one of the founders of the Asociación Española de Urología.\textsuperscript{4}

Isidro Sánchez Covisa was the third head of the Urology Department of the Provincial Hospital, in which he conducted a great urologic work between 1914 and 1936. From 1928, he managed to transform it and make it considered the best of Spain at that time. He published Urología Clínica, a journal in which, in addition to scientific articles, he meticulously exposes the changes in the Department and the work done, with careful annual statistics on the assistance given, the operations, and the mortality.

Material and methods

We analyzed the publication Urología Clínica, subtitled ‘Boletín Del Servicio de Urología del Dr. Sánchez Covisa Department’, edited in the press of the Navy Department,
Madrid, and that after an exhaustive search we could only find it in the library of the Fundación Puigver, Barcelona. His aim was that the appearance was annual, but economic opportunities did not make it possible.

The first issue that we have at our disposal, which takes number 2, appeared in 1931 and it includes the statistical data for the activities of the years 1928–1929 and 1929–1930, with 18 scientific articles. Number 3, 1933, concerning the years 1930–1931 and 1931–1932, has 19 items. The last one is number 1 of the second volume, 1936, and it includes the activity of the years 1933, 1934, and 1935, with 33 works. We add a short biography of the physicians of the Department.

**Result**

Isidro Sanchez Covisa (Huete [Cuenca], 1879–Madrid, 1944) (Fig. 1), trained in Urology in the same center with Bravo Piqueras, later expanded his preparation at the Necker Hospital in Paris and London. He gained access to the Hospital by means of a selection process involving competitive examinations and interviews, in 1907, with a position in the urinary tract office, where he developed his career. He took responsibility for the leadership of the Department in 1914, he began a great both clinical and surgical work that included various studies, helped by an excellent team of contributors, and he also created a training school in the specialty. The need for better resources and conditions to treat patients led him, finally, to make a complete restructuring of the Department.

He published *Urología Clínica* (Fig. 2) with the idea of maintaining a scientific relationship with all the colleagues who had specialized or had improved their urological knowledge with him, with whom once scattered in different places, he wants to keep contact in order to brush up on what he had taught them and keep them well informed of ongoing urological developments. At the same time, he requests reciprocal treatment, he expects to receive contributions that show the work and urological experiences, very different in rural areas and in a large hospital, and, thus, promote contact and union between them.

After completion of the works, the Department was inaugurated in 1932, and it described in the “Bulletin” the remarkable conversion that it suffered (Fig. 3), which allows for all types of research, both diagnostic and exploratory, and the treatment practice necessary for proper and effective treatment of patients. He explained the distribution of the enclosures that it consists of, those for use in endoscopy (Fig. 4), one for men and one for women, a radiographic

![Figure 1](image1.png) **Dr. D. Isidro Sánchez Covisa.**

![Figure 2](image2.png) **Cover of the publication *Urología Clínica*.**

![Figure 3](image3.png) **Original appearance of the men’s room before remodeling.**
He continued with the organization of the two hospitalization wards, the one for women, with 20 beds and 4 for children, and the one for men with 35; the latter divides it longitudinally in half by means of a partition of 1.80 m high inside which run electrical and telephone cables, and where he built a sort of a niche with glass doors to locate the container or bottle of urine ‘[...] which makes it possible to observe the appearance and amount thereof, by a glance through its transparent door [...]’; inside, and all along this wall runs a ventilation duct to prevent unpleasant odors. It has, on both sides of the wall and every 4 m, partition walls, on whose sides are the beds attached and opposite by their headboards on either side of the partition wall, in which a metallic closet adjacent to each bed is built. This way, he set an appropriate distance between them, which facilitates easy access and provides some insulation. He installed, in addition, three separate rooms for paying patients and enabled a stay as a dining room, with separate tables for 4 people, also used as recreational space.

He exposed the statistics of the work carried out in the Department in the three-year period 1928–1930, which included examinations, analytical determinations, and various urological treatments with a total number of 37,710. The operations of this period were 58 nephrectomies, 4 nephrostomies, and 106 performances on the ureter, with a mortality of 12.3%. On the bladder, 65 interventions were performed, all of them hypogastric sizes due to various indications and with a mortality of 21.5%. On the prostate, hypogastric prostatectomy was performed in 16 cases in one time and 33 in two, and one perineally due to cancer; mortality was 8%. In the other processes on the urethra, 113 performances were carried out with 5 cases of death from septicemia, 61 on the penis and testicles, and 51 on the scrotum and vagina. In summary, of a total of 445 operations, overall mortality was 8.3%.

The statistics of years 1931 and 1932 correspond to 1830 patients, with a total of 8700 examinations and multiple determinations. Surgery decreases due to the works and not being able to include all the cases as they are incomplete – together they account for 352 – with a mortality of 5.68%.

In 1930, the head surgeon, Isidro Sánchez Covisa, signed 19 works and was the one who performed the majority of surgical operations. He had an excellent team of collaborators. Among them was the intern doctor Luis Resel Maceira (Madrid, 1908–1988), who studied at the Colegio de San Carlos, where he graduated in 1931. He was in charge of surgery on Mondays. Later, he was the professor in charge of the professorship in Anatomy and associate professor of Urology, at the Faculty of Medicine of the Universidad Complutense. In 1953, thanks to a competitive examination, he got a position as a doctor at the Provincial Charity and worked as a specialist at the Social Security. He wrote an article.

Several external aggregate doctors excelled. Agustín Hidalgo and Fernández Caro (Santa Olaya [Toledo], 1903–Madrid, 1975), graduated in Madrid in 1927, began his specialization in the Department, in which he prolonged his stay and he used to see patients where he wrote his PhD thesis ‘The alkaline reserve in urological practice’. In 1955, he was an associate professor of Urology at the Universidad de Madrid and a company secretary of the Board of Directors of the AEU in 1932. He was a very prolific author, with sixteen studies. Luis Angulo Pastor (Burgos, 1906–1990),

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**Figure 4** Endoscopy room.

**Figure 5** Room of files and archive.

**Figure 6** Aseptic operating room.

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graduated in 1929 and trained at the Hospital Provincial de Madrid, stayed there with the task of performing cystoscopy on women. 5 articles are collected. Joaquín Sánchez Covisa (Huete [Cuenc], 1884–Madrid, 1973), graduated from the Universidad de Madrid in 1907, was Isidro’s brother, with whom he specialized in Urology. He was also a radiologist, so he was in charge of making these explorations. He entered the Navy Medical Corps in 1912, where he attained the rank of colonel; he served at the Red Cross Hospital as well.4

Other medical assistants also deserve special mention. Tomás de la Maza Saavedra (La Habana [Cuba], 1896–Madrid, 1960) graduated from the Universidad de Madrid in 1919, and worked in male cystoscopy. He was the chief of the Urology Department at the Instituto de Medical Pathology by Dr. Marañón and company secretary of the Board of Directors of the AEU in 1929.7 He provided 6 works. Gonzalo Sánchez Romero, a graduate from the Universidad de Madrid in 1929, attended male cystoscopy. He contributed with 5 articles. Luis Raposo Montero (A Estrada [Pontevedra], November 26, 1911) graduated in Medicine in 1933 at the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela with a rating of outstanding and extraordinary award. He went to Madrid to prepare his Ph.D. with Dr. de la Peña Díaz, who introduced him into Urology, and, decided to specialize, he entered the Department of Sánchez Covisa where he helped in female cystoscopy. After a year, he obtained a scholarship and moved to Berlin to the Virchow Hospital surgical clinic. The civil war forced him to return to Spain, he fought as a physician, and, in 1945, he began his practice in Santiago until his retirement.6

He participated with a work. Fernando Lago Olano (Vigo 1908–1995) studied Medicine in Santiago de Compostela and graduated with honors in 1934. Determined to perform the urological specialty as a medical assistant in the Department of Sánchez Covisa, where female cystoscopies were also performed.6 José María Lastra y Campes, a Cuban trained in Havana, extended his preparation in Spain. At the Urology Department was in charge of the laboratory. He was a professor of Surgery at the Universidad de la Habana.7

As long-standing boarders appear Ramiro Arroyo-López and Ramón Viscasillas, and as external students Ángel Castro, Luis Antón Salbadie, Juan Ontoneda, Ángel González and Isidro Sánchez Covisa (son).

With the Civil War, this great task stopped and the Department unit disappeared; because of political reasons, Sánchez Covisa was exiled to South America, from where he returned in 1942, but he could not return to his job at the hospital and died in Madrid in August 1944.5

Discussion

After 14 years of continuous work, Isidro Sánchez Covisa, a man of upright and energetic character in his decisions, with his ability, his great authority, his persuasiveness and organization skills overcame all obstacles, and although the hospital lacked great resources, he was able to begin a gradual transformation of the Department to achieve what he calls “a complete Urological Unit”, with the expansion and modernization of its operating rooms which were equipped with the best means of exploration, so he turned it, in 1931, into an exemplary workplace, which according to Pulido Martín5 and Insauti Cordón5, was considered of the highest quality and prestige in Spain, comparable to the best abroad. It was also a major urology specialty schools in the first half of the twentieth century in our country, to which many doctors came, many of them Spanish Americans.10

The Provincial Hospital was the one with the highest capacity in Madrid and welcomed patients from everywhere, including those rejected by other centers, hence the intense activity and the difficult operations, which Dr. Sánchez Covisa, with his surgical skill, skillfully overcame.

In the fifty works written, cases of tumor nephrectomy were addressed, and considerations on renal neoplasias are also made, series of operations on lithiasis with pyelolithotomies and approach of the urethral ones, resolution of cases of hydronephrosis and urinary fistulas (urethral, urethro-rectal, urachal, and vaginal) are presented. In complicated cases, they resort to uretero-intestinal diversion by Coffey’s method, analyzing its procedure and guidelines. They also perform a total prostatectomy due to carcinoma with Young’s technique. They describe infectious processes with resolution of urinous abscesses, urethral strictures, and urinary incontinence symptoms as the most outstanding articles. In addition, interesting clinical cases, of tuberculosis, of hydatidosis, and mere reviews of various casuistries are shown, as well as the analysis of their 250 suprapubic prostatectomies; finally, there are some research papers on renal function tests.

In summary, the prestige that the Urology Unit of the Hospital Provincial de Madrid reached attracted sick people already treated and operated in their place of origin, so the pathology treated was complicated and the surgery practiced was in line with the best centers at the time, with a usually good surgical outcome and a declining mortality in recent years. The extraordinary work done, along with the quality and honesty of its display, make it worth the expression given by the above mentioned colleagues.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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