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History of the Sociedad Española de Diabetes:

background, creation, and early years

Historia de la Sociedad Española de Diabetes

En 1933 cuando yo acabé la carrera, todo lo relacionado con la diabetes se trataba en los Congresos de la Sociedad Española de Aparato Digestivo y de la Nutrición.

El día 10 de junio de 1949 se celebró en Bruselas el II Congreso Internacional de Terapéutica al que acudimos tres españoles: Rodríguez Candela, Jiménez García y yo, que presenté por primera vez en un Congreso Internacional una comunicación sobre: "Papel del riñón en la diabetes experimental".

In the first half of the 20th century, the study of diabetes and debates about its diagnosis and treatment took place within the framework of other scientific societies and, specifically in Spain, in one of them: the society devoted to the Digestive System and Nutrition. It was on June 10, 1949, at the II International Congress of Therapeutics held in Brussels, that the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) was created; and it was within this framework that, a few years later, the impetus arose to promote a scientific society devoted exclusively to diabetes.

As happens in other areas of life, there are a series of events that encourage certain people—in this case, a group of physicians—to organize themselves to achieve a common goal and, in the case at hand, to establish the Sociedad Española de Diabetes (SED). In general, in this type of initiative there is leadership: someone capable of dedicating time and, on some occasions, resources to achieving the proposed goal. In the founding of the SED, it would be an internist, Dr. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón, who would carry the project forward.

Dr. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón (1909–2001), after obtaining his doctorate in medicine in 1936, showed a special interest in the clinical care of people with diabetes and in the

study of this disease. A disciple of the prestigious Professor Carlos Jiménez Díaz, he was appointed assistant physician in Nutrition and Endocrinology at the Polyclinic of Instituto de Investigaciones Médicas de Madrid (Madrid, Spain) in 1940. Two years later, in 1942, he received a scholarship for a training stay at the Diabetikerheim in Graz, one of Germany's leading diabetes research centers. On his return, he was appointed head of the Department of Endocrinology and Nutrition at Clínica La Concepción in Madrid and focused his research on diabetes at Instituto de Investigaciones Médicas de the Fundación Jiménez Díaz. Later, in 1949, at the abovementioned International Congress of Therapeutics, Dr. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón presented his first scientific communication on the role of the kidney in experimental diabetes. He thus showed a clear vocation for the study of the disease.

However, Rodríguez-Miñón's interest was not only research, but also clinical practice and health education. Proof of this is that, among other activities, in 1953 he decided to create a journal, *Diabetes*. This publication was devoted not only to professionals, but also to people living with the disease and their families, and it will soon reach 75 years of existence. Through it, the aim was to disseminate, rigorously, advances and knowledge about diabetes. He would be its first editor. The first issue of the journal *Diabetes* appeared in October 1954.

The publication of the journal *Diabetes* was not an isolated initiative. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón himself, at the same time and around the same dates, founded the Sociedad Española de Diabetes. The idea occurred to him at the first IDF congress, held in Leiden, the Netherlands, in 1952. He himself tells us the details of the founding of the SED in a handwritten letter that can be read on the current website of the society (<https://www.sediabetes.org/institucion/historia>). He says:

"The IDF was made up of the different Diabetes Societies from all over the world, and it was then that I felt the need to found the Sociedad Española de

Diabetes and a journal, *Diabetes*. Since I was, at that time, one among many, I asked my teacher, Don Carlos Jiménez Díaz, to accept the presidency of this Society. (...) Of course, from the first day of its foundation, the SED was a full member of the IDF."

In the first board of the SED, Dr. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón served as secretary; however, just one year later, in 1955, he was appointed president, a position he held until 1976, when he was succeeded by Dr. Clemente López Quijada. From that point on, the presidency of the Society was renewed every 4 years through elections among its members.

There is no doubt that the SED owes much to the initiative and determination of Rodríguez-Miñón: namely, the existence in our country of a scientific society oriented toward the study of diabetes.

The reader may wonder why Dr. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón, an internist by training and, in daily clinical practice, dedicated to endocrinology and nutrition, had the idea of creating the SED. In my view, there was a compelling reason, one that is even more important today. It is the following.

People with diabetes are cared for by more than one specialist. Pediatricians care for the boys and girls who have the disease; primary care physicians and internists attend to patients in its more chronic form; endocrinologists focus their work on people with type 1 diabetes mellitus; nurses have specialized in therapeutic education. And we must not forget nutritionists, psychologists, specialists in physical activity, podiatrists, and, of course, ophthalmologists who treat diabetic retinopathy, nephrologists who treat renal complications, and the other specialties that help relieve or cure other chronic complications, whether vascular, involving the peripheral nervous system, or cardiac. This is cross-cutting and complex care that requires a global vision. The SED is the social and scientific response. It is not oriented toward a medical specialty, but toward a disease, toward the resolution of a problem. It places the patient, the person

suffering from a disease, at the center as its sole mission. That is why the founders of the SED were right.

The initiative to create a diabetes society was not an easy task. Dr. Rodríguez-Miñón himself pointed this out. At the beginning, it was the Sociedad Española de Endocrinología—"and Nutrition" was not included in its name until 1991—that gave the SED one afternoon to discuss diabetes-related topics. Of note, in its first 22 years of history, the SED held only 3 scientific congresses. It was not until the presidency of Dr. Manuel Serrano Ríos that the congresses began to be held every 2 years and then every year, as they are today.

Over time, the SED has grown. And, answering the question posed in the title, the early years were difficult. The journal *Diabetes* had only one sponsor, far from any support from a specific company or foundation. A laboratory unrelated to the specialty, ROVI, motivated by friendship with its founder, financed it. Nor was the effort toward internationalization an easy task, partly because of the country's political situation during Franco's regime. The first prestigious international congress in Spain—the IDF—was not held in Madrid until 1985, promoted under the presidency of Dr. Manuel Serrano Ríos (1980–1984). And the SED did not have its own headquarters until 1996, during the board chaired by Dr. José Luis Herrera Pombo.

One of the society's founding characteristics was its concern for research. Initially, the Hagedorn Award was created to recognize the research work of its members. Later, other awards were created for basic and clinical research for young and senior researchers, and for diabetes education. One of the awards bears the name of the founder of the SED, Rodríguez-Miñón. Of note, during the presidency of Dr. Alberto de Leiva, the journal *Avances en Diabetes* was created—the first issue appeared in January 1988—aimed at publishing scientific articles on diabetes. During the presidency of Dr. Anna Novials, this publication merged with the journal of Endocrinology and Nutrition of Socie- ➤

HISTORICAL LIST OF SED PRESIDENTS



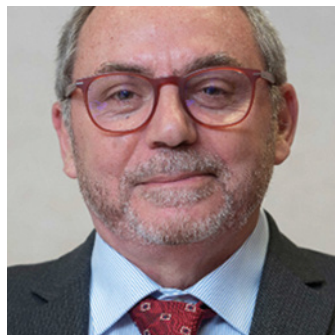
Dr. D. Carlos Jiménez Díaz 1954-1955

Dr. D. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón
1955-1976Dr. D. Clemente López Quijada
1976-1980

Dr. D. Manuel Serrano Ríos 1980-1984

Dr. D. Enrique Blázquez Fernández
1984-1988Dr. D. Alberto de Leiva Hidalgo
1988-1992Dr. D. José Antonio Vázquez García
1992-1996Dr. D. José Luis Herrera Pombo
1996-2000

Dr. D. Bernat Soria Escoms 2000-2004

Dr. D. Ramón Gomis de Barbarà 2004-
2008Dr. D. Manuel Aguilar Diosdado 2008-
2011Dra. Dña. Sonia Gaztambide Sáenz
2011-2014Dr. D. Edelmiro Menéndez To-
rre 2014-2017Dra. Dña. Anna Novials Sardá
2017-2020

Dr. D. Antonio Pérez Pérez 2020-2024

Dr. D. Fco. Javier Ampudia Blasco
2024-2026

IN GENERAL, IN THIS TYPE OF INITIATIVE THERE IS LEADERSHIP: SOMEONE CAPABLE OF DEDICATING TIME AND, ON SOME OCCASIONS, RESOURCES TO ACHIEVING THE PROPOSED GOAL. IN THE FOUNDING OF THE SED, IT WOULD BE AN INTERNIST, DR. JOSÉ LUIS RODRÍGUEZ-MIÑÓN, WHO WOULD CARRY THE PROJECT FORWARD

» dad Española de Endocrinología y Nutrición (SEEN). Currently, Endocrinología, Diabetes y Nutrición is the scientific organ of both societies, SEEN and SED. The first issue of this new publication appeared in January 2017.

As we have explained, from its beginnings the SED had a vocation for cross-cutting action and for influencing professionals from different specialties. Thus, among its members, it includes not only physicians in any of their specialties, including primary care, but also basic science researchers—biologists, biochemists, pathologists—and health care specialists in nursing and nutrition. This is an attribute that distinguishes it from many

other societies oriented more toward professional activity than toward the study of a disease. And, as in other social spheres, more than 50 years had to pass in the SED before a woman was elected president: Dr. Sonia Gaztambide, in 2011.

Although the challenges of those early years are no longer the same, the spirit of the mission remains. A few changes have been made, and more will follow, but without losing the spirit established by the first founders. To feel, as William Osler said, the satisfaction that our vocation—to alleviate and cure diabetes—is one of the oldest and, like old age itself, the most honorable of vocations. **D**

CONCLUSIONS

The SED was born from the impetus of a group of medical professionals gathered around Dr. José Luis Rodríguez-Miñón.

The SED was created as a society oriented toward a disease. It seeks to incorporate professionals from different branches of knowledge to provide better care for people who suffer from the disease.

The journal Diabetes appeared around the same time, with the vocation of keeping health care professionals and people living with the disease up to date on diabetes.

From its beginnings, the SED has been part of the IDF.

In its first 22 years of existence, the SED held only three scientific congresses; today, it holds them every year.

The first international congress—the IDF—was not held in Spain until 1985.

REFERENCES

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- 3.- William Osler. Un estilo de vida y otros discursos. Unión Editorial. Madrid 2007