Rodrigo A. Muñoz, MD (1939-2020)


Rod was born on March 21, 1939 in Popayan, Colombia, where his father served as a local judge. After graduation from the medical school of the University of Cauca in his hometown, Rod trained briefly at the Antioquia Mental Hospital on the outskirts of Medellin, Colombia. He then emigrated to the United States, starting his psychiatric training at Fairfield Hills Hospital in Connecticut, an affiliate of Yale University. Under the influence of Daniel X. Freedman, MD, who at the time was a faculty member at Yale, Rod followed his interest in psychiatry as a medical discipline and chose to train at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.1

Rod’s role as a medically focused psychiatrist and lifelong patient advocate was shaped by the training he received at the strongly medically oriented Department of Psychiatry at Washington University. He later recalled his years at Washington University as a highlight of his professional life.1 He became involved in research and academia and co-authored original papers (with several AACP luminaries), including one describing the Washington University (“Feighner”) criteria, which became one of the most influential and frequently cited papers in American psychiatry.2 This work inspired the diagnostic criteria published in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

After completing his training, Rod briefly practiced in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and ultimately settled in sunny San Diego, where he spent the rest of his professional career and life. He established a busy clinical practice north of downtown San Diego. Despite his busy practice and raising 3 children after his wife died unexpectedly, Rod remained close to academia. He became a clinical teacher at the Department of Psychiatry, University of California San Diego (UCSD) and conducted clinical trials. He published several papers describing his clinical observations (some co-authored by his mentor, Eli Robins). Rod was also a passionate teacher. He received the Distinguished Clinical Teacher Award from the Department of Psychiatry, UCSD, and the Outstanding Mentorship Award from the California Medical Students Association. Some of us who still remember the oral examination of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology may also remember Boarding Time,3 a book he co-authored with Jim Morrison that served as the essential guide for examination candidates.

Being an international medical graduate (IMG) and noting the many challenges such clinicians face, Rod became highly interested in their integration in American psychiatry. He became politically active within the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and other organizations, constantly advocating for IMGs.4 He was elected Trustee of the APA and in 1998 became the second IMG and first Hispanic President of the APA. He inspired many IMGs to become involved in the APA and its leadership. He was committed to clinical care, and it is telling that as APA President, Rod chose “A Clinician” as his theme for the APA annual meeting.

Rod was also involved in the AACP from its start, and served as President in the mid-1980s. His second
wife, Alicia, was AACP Executive Secretary for many years. Rod was very fond of the AACP, and during his years as President he brought many new members into the organization, including one of us (RB). He was a great mentor to many psychiatrists and psychiatric trainees.

Rod was a fine clinician and was very fond of his patients. He was a pleasant and humble man who loved life and lived it to the fullest.

RIP, Rodrigo Muñoz.

Richard Balon, MD
Donald W. Black, MD

REFERENCES