



LECTURE

Egas Moniz: the man and his work

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Special Issue on Controversies in Neurology. From the 10th World Congress on Controversies in Neurology (CONy), Lisbon, Portugal. 17–20 March 2016.

Abstract

Egas Moniz was a Portuguese neurologist (1874-1955) with a multivariate scope of interests and remarkable interventions in Portuguese society: formerly as politician and later as physician, investigator and writer. Internationally he is recognized after his contributions to the advance of medicine.

He was the founder of Portuguese Neurology and gained international recognition because of the development of cerebral angiography and later, because the surgical attempt to treat some psychiatric diseases: the so called Leucotomy.

He was awarded with Noble Prize in 1949 shared with the Swiss psychologist Walter Hess.

Egas Moniz was graduated at the University of Coimbra 1899 and begun his carrier in 1900 joining an academic position at that University of Coimbra with a place at the Portuguese monarch parliament.

Soon after (1902) he directed his curiosity to Neurology and during his summer holidays he was able to spare a couple of weeks to visit La Salpêtrière were some members of the golden era of the French and world neurology worked, such as Babinski who became close friend of him.

After quitting a delusive political career where he was minister of foreign affairs and president of the Portuguese delegation to the peace conference at Versailles "with more sorrows than good remembrances" as he used to say, he dedicated his whole energies to medicine and the scientific talent of Egas Moniz was revealed.

Angiography. The knowledge of brain circulation and though this, the brain pathology, namely tumors and other intracranial abnormalities along with cerebrovascular pathology became possible after his discovery in 1927 which is still performed everyday in large hospitals worldwide. Vascular structures like carotid siphon owe its name after him.

Leucotomy. In an era of no effective treatment for psychiatric diseases forcing many patients to remain institutionalized for live, the idea of a surgical procedure to calm agitated patients allowing them to return to community was attractive. His experimental attempts by causing small lesions in both frontal lobes showed promising results. Driving these experimental ideas into an unwise massive practice as Walter Freeman in USA, did, (the so called lobotomy) launched much controversy and discredit.

Egas Moniz never performed any of these procedures (either angiography or leucotomy): he was a man of ideas and as he used to say: he was the brain and his surgical colleagues, their hands.

After retirement in 1945 he dedicated to writing and his private practice at downtown Lisbon. He received many international awards in recognition of his role in the development of Medicine, including the Noble prize in 1949.

He died in Lisbon in December 1955 at 81 years of age.

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Citation: Oliveira, V. Egas Moniz: the man and his work. International Journal of Clinical Neurosciences and Mental Health 2016; 3(Suppl. 1):L1

Published: 16 March 2016

