

Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez, founder and father of Obstetrics in Cuba

Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez, fundador y padre de la Obstetricia en Cuba

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ABSTRACT

The study of historical personalities is of vital importance, especially of scientists who not only contributed their knowledge, but also took up arms. The objective of this research was to describe the life and work of the mambí, obstetrician and teacher Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez. A bibliographical review of 17 bibliographical sources was carried out, using the following theoretical methods: analytical-synthetic, historical-logical and deductive-inductive. The innovative contributions of Dr. Eusebio Hernandez to Obstetrics constitute a reference for the genesis of this specialty in Cuba. Knowing and disseminating his career is currently a work of deep gratitude to such a prestigious personality, whose contributions to Obstetrics made him the most notable figure of this branch of medicine in Cuba.

Keywords: Cuba; History; Physicians; Obstetrics.

RESUMEN

El estudio de las personalidades históricas es de vital importancia, en especial de científicos que no solo aportaron sus conocimientos, sino que también tomaron las armas. El objetivo de esta investigación fue describir la vida y obra del mambí, obstetra y maestro Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez. Se realizó una revisión bibliográfica de 17 fuentes bibliográficas, en la que se emplearon los métodos teóricos: analítico-sintético, histórico-lógico y el deductivo-inductivo. Las renovadoras contribuciones del Dr. Eusebio Hernández a la Obstetricia constituyen un referente para la génesis de esta especialidad en Cuba. Conocer y difundir su trayectoria representa en la actualidad una obra de profundo agradecimiento a tan prestigiosa personalidad, cuyos aportes a la Obstetricia lo convirtieron en la figura más notable de esta rama de la medicina en Cuba.

Palabras clave: Cuba; Historia; Médicos; Obstetricia.



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INTRODUCTION

The history of Cuba as a discipline is an indispensable foundation in the conservation and defense of the ideology of the Revolution, by making known the formation and evolution of the Cuban people, the thought and the actions of the characters who erected this state in a long way of battles to achieve definitive emancipation¹.

The improvement in the dissemination and teaching of the history of Cuba, in the efforts to fortify national unity and stimulate understanding of the genesis and development of the Cuban nation, consolidate its own ideology, from a universal, national, regional and local perspective, is of vital importance for the conformation of an individual who is capable of identifying with his history, his culture and his values. In this regard, the leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz stated¹: *"Studying history and studying it thoroughly is perhaps the most extraordinary instrument that we have available to transmit values, patriotic sentiments, revolutionary sentiments, heroic sentiments. It is a weapon at the service of culture, at the service of teaching how to think and defend ideas, essential processes in the preparation of the new generations"*.

For ages, man has felt the need to learn about the lives of individuals who, depending on the activity they displayed, has allowed them to be distinguished between a common man and an outstanding personality. This motivation should be used so that students approach the study of relevant personalities, from a humanistic perspective. In Cuba, the programs of history subjects establish the study of personalities within the content system to be developed. Despite this, there are insufficiencies in the treatment of these, since sometimes the role of these personalities is exaggerated and the context in which they developed is not taken into account, which disfigures knowledge and prevents an appropriate assessment of its importance. in the course of humanity².

At present, they go unnoticed by various generations of Cuban medical combatants who, throughout the history of Cuba, have had a distinguished participation in the efforts to liberate their nation. Among these figures are, to name just a few: Pedro Betancourt Dávalos, Ambrosio Grillo Portuondo, Juan Bruno Zayas Alfonso, Félix Figueredo Díaz, Hugo Roberts Fernández and Antonio Lorenzo Luaces Iraola³. These personalities not only offered their knowledge as scientists, but also took up arms. This representation also includes the mambí, obstetrician and teacher Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez, who, at the service of the just cause to see Cuba as sovereign, perfectly combined these three positions to remain undefeated and forever in the history of said country. Studying, knowing, researching and disseminating the work of Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez continues to be a pending task for professionals linked to the specialty to which this figure contributed so much, which motivated the realization of this research, whose objective was to describe the life and work of this professional of medical sciences in Cuba.

METHOD

A bibliographic review was carried out in the period from March to April 2022. Theoretical methods were used: analytical-synthetic, historical-logical and deductive-inductive. Sources available in the Infomed network and in the Scopus, Cumed and Lilacs databases were consulted. The Google Scholar search engine was used, with the terms: 'Obstetrics', 'Medical', 'History' and 'Cuba'. The following search strategy was formed: (Obstetrics) AND (Doctors) AND (History) AND (Cuba). It is necessary to declare as a limitation of the study the scarce existing information on the subject, which made it necessary to select a total of 17 articles found at the time of the search, without discriminating the year of publication. Those published from the year 2008 were selected. The validity, quality and methodological reliability of the articles were analyzed to guarantee an adequate review.

DEVELOPMENT

In the city of Colón, present-day Matanzas province, the eminent Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez was born on January 18, 1853, product of the union between Francisco Hernández and Rosario Pérez⁴. At just 16 years old, during the 1968 War in Cuba, he participated in the uprising of Monte Corojo, led by Gabriel García Menocal in Jagüey Grande, administrator of the "Australia" sugar mill and father of the future Major General of the Liberation Army Mario García Menocal Deop, who was president during the neocolonial republic^{5,6}.

He studied high school at the Institute of Secondary Education in Havana, and was there when the horrendous execution of the eight medical students took place on November 27, 1871. In 1874 he was sent to Madrid by his family to study medicine, interrupted by their activities in favor of the independence of Cuba. There he established links with the independence Revolution due to the presence of General Calixto García, and it was not until 1888 that he finished his medical degree at the Central University of Madrid⁵.

In August 1879, convinced that only armed struggle could lead to full sovereignty, he joined the organizers of La Guerra Chiquita (1879-1880) in Santiago de Cuba. Once this was concluded, he went to Jamaica and, in Kingston, upon meeting Máximo Gómez, he placed himself under his command⁵.

During October 1880 he met Antonio Maceo on the island of Jamaica. He was his personal doctor and, furthermore, his most intimate adviser in strategic decisions of the revolutionary independence movement between 1880 and 1887. The fact of being able to count on a great and perpetuated friendship established him as a doctor for almost the entire Maceo family. It was precisely he who had the responsibility of assisting the delivery of the Jamaican Amelia Marriat, with whom Maceo had an affective relationship. In this way, Eusebio would be the doctor who attended the birth of Antonio Maceo Marriat, the only direct descendant of Antonio Maceo who survived his death^{6,7}. It is also known that in 1880 he was able to assist Bernarda Toro Pelegrín ("Manana"), the wife of Generalissimo Máximo Gómez, during the delivery of her son Fernando^{6,8}.

His participation in the Gómez-Maceo plan (1884-1886), also known as the San Pedro Sula Revolutionary Program, was notorious. He was director of the hospital in Tegucigalpa (Honduras) and was linked to Gómez, who at that time was military chief of the port of Amapala and San Pedro Sula. As part of this plan, Eusebio Hernández was to leave for Cuba on an expedition from Kingston with Agustín Cebreco, José Maceo and other patriots, as well as travel to Guatemala and El Salvador with the aim of collecting funds and recruiting men^{6,8}.

After finishing his medical degree, and the Gómez-Maceo plan failed, he decided to go to Europe to carry out specialized studies in obstetrics and gynecology in Paris, where, in 1889, he met Adolf Pinard, who was his close friend and teacher. This allowed him to form among the disciples of the reformer of contemporary obstetrics at the Baudelocque Clinic, at the head of which he figured, since 1890, as professor of childbirth at the Parisian faculty⁵.

According to an article published by Sarduy Nápoles et al.⁹, the first cesarean section performed by a Cuban doctor was precisely at the hands of the obstetrics professor Eusebio Hernández y Pérez on August 12, 1890, at 4:30 a.m., to his wife at the Clinique D' Accouchements, Baudelocque, in Paris, which is reflected in a letter sent on August 23, 1890 from that city, to his dear boss and friend Máximo Gómez, in which he emotionally tells him the details and the form of birth of your child.

As a passionate disciple in the obstetric revolution initiated by Professor Pinard, Eusebio Hernández coincided with the impetus of abdominal palpation and its complements, the version by external maneuvers and measurable palpation, which transformed the obstetric diagnosis of that time. He witnessed the clinical and anatomical demonstration of the mechanisms of labor and delivery; the renaissance of the symphysiotomy; the establishment of the scientific treatment of hemorrhages due to previous placenta; the regulation of the internal version and of most of the manoeuvres. He praised Pinard's efforts in favor of helpless poor mothers and unfortunate children deprived of protection, an act that generated a new science: childcare, which Dr. Hernández considered the sister of sociology given its importance in the study, conservation, development and improvement of the human species, for which reason he deliberated that it could be called "species medicine"¹⁰.

The author considers that the influence of Professor Pinard was decisive for the training, performance and achievement of Eusebio's aptitudes, which would later make him one of his most remembered disciples.

These memorable studies made him think about the good results that could be brought to Cuba by publicizing, with Pinard's authorization, the operation of the Baudelocque Clinic in the Crónica Médico Quirúrgica and in other Cuban medical publications of that time. The same aspirations to disseminate the learned European knowledge and practices led him to Berlin in 1891 to study operative gynecology, related to obstetrics¹⁰.

During the years 1893-1894, already established in Cuba, he studied for a doctorate at the Royal and Literary University of Havana with outstanding grades, but it was not until 1899 that he presented his thesis "New cause of anatomical rigidity of the cervix during childbirth". that he had left pending in 1894 for being linked to the independence movement^{4,11}.

Without a doubt, one of his great feats in his fruitful career was his participation in the preparation of the 1995 War, linked to José Martí and generals Máximo Gómez, Antonio Maceo, Calixto García, José Maceo and José María Rodríguez. Under the command of Major General Calixto García, he disembarked on March 24, 1896 in the steamer "Bermuda" through Maraví, Baracoa, with 78 other expedition members; among them, Dr. Pedro Estanislao Betancourt (also from Matanzas), Dr. Martín Marrero and the Matanzas lawyer Cosme de la Torriente Peraza. Later he was in the General Staff of José Maceo. In May 1896, the Generalissimo granted him the rank of lieutenant colonel and stayed with him during a period of the war campaign that he developed⁶. His participation in the combats of Saratoga, Loma del Hierro, Cascorro and in the captures of Guáimaro, Las Tunas and Guisa earned him his promotion to colonel^{5, 6, 8, 10}.

It is unavoidable to point out that, in all the combats, Eusebio Hernández, as a military doctor, paid attention to the many wounded in the difficult conditions of the campaign, most of the time with few resources, events that demonstrated his professional skill and extended his prestige within the troop⁶.

In 1896, his election as a representative to the Assembly of La Yaya was rejected because he disagreed with

the method used to elect the delegates, and he participated in the commission that drafted the Law of Military Health of the Liberation Army. During the Necessary War, his outstanding performance earned him the positions of undersecretary and secretary of foreign relations of the Republic of Cuba in Arms, delegate to the Constituent Assembly (1897) and to the Assembly of Representatives of the Liberation Army (1898-1899), and also, gain the rank of brigadier general of the Liberation Army^{4,5}.

His ideology on the social concept of obstetrics made it possible for him to establish the first birth clinic in Cuba with absolutely free services, with the help of Rosalía Abreu (Marta Abreu's sister) for the acquisition of necessary instruments and furniture, before which he faced many difficulties since the intervening authorities did not give him any of the many unoccupied premises that the state owned. The long-awaited Republic was frustrated by the North American intervention, he maintained his patriotic doctrines, supported the most liberal causes and rejected all kinds of annexationist ideas, being an intransigent opponent of the Platt Amendment^{5,11}.

He was chosen as a pre-candidate for the vice presidency of the Republic by the Liberal Party in the first republican elections of the year 1902 in the Bartolomé Masó – Eusebio Hernández binomial, competing for the candidacy presented by Tomás Estrada Palma^{4,11}.

For 1908, new elections were called and the Historical Liberal Party proposed José Miguel Gómez, for the presidency, and Eusebio Hernández, for the vice presidency, who later gave up his candidacy to Alfredo Zayas. Years later, when the Academy of History was created, he was one of its founding members and elected vice president of the Veterans Center, an entity he served at different times in his life¹¹.

He established links with Dr. Gustavo Aldereguía Lima, with whom he founded the provisional publication Los Amigos de Rusia in 1920, where solidarity support for the Soviet Union was expressed. Previously, together with Aldereguía himself, he had collected money sent to the leader and leader of the Great October Socialist Revolution, Lenin⁵. In this way, it can be appreciated how Dr. Hernández not only offered his contribution to the emancipation of the Cuban people, but also supported the Russian brothers.

Possibly none of the courageous defenders of independence in Cuba surpassed Eusebio Hernández in terms of the acuity with which he interpreted the economic and social problem, since he knew in depth the determining causes of the country's public ills. He raised his voice for the protection of children and the elderly, and also for a law on work accidents and other edges for social improvement. Ideas like these made him stand next to Julio Antonio Mella in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana to support the university reform of 1923. He was present at the First Student Congress from October 15 to 28, 1923 and at the foundation of the Popular University „José Martí“^{10,11}.

The overcrowded conditions offered by the chair of obstetrics in the Zanja y Belascoáin mansion, Hospital Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes (today Hospital "Comandante Manuel Fajardo") were not conducive to teaching medicine, and the transfer of his school to the „Calixto García" Hospital. The senate was aware of the situation, but nothing conceived in the face of such claims. The first blow was made by Dr. Eusebio Hernández, who „took by assault" –according to his own words- the delivery room of the „Calixto García" (Maternity Ward) in 1920, since the Las Mercedes ward, unique in character until then, the teaching staff was limited in space where only 24 beds could fit, while Havana needed at least 100 for teaching, where pathological cases could be selected, especially dystocic^{5,11,12}. This act was later recognized and legalized by the President of the Republic, Alfredo Zayas, and by law on October 15, 1923. In this way, two obstetrics chairs were created with their clinic, a case that occurred for the first time in the School of Medicine¹¹.

From that day on, the Faculty of Medicine had a teaching material that duplicated, at least, what it had until then. Professor Eusebio endowed that hospital with all the necessary advances: an amphitheater was built where obstetrics classes were given, the sterilizers used in the operating room were provided, a laboratory was founded, and an X-ray department was conferred to the university.^{11,12}

The Royal Academy of Medical, Physical and Natural Sciences of Cuba, of which he was a member, granted him on March 26, 1926 the high distinction of „Honorary Academician"¹¹. He was the founder of childcare in Cuba, which he called „homicultura" and about which he published a great homonymous book (1911) together with Dr. Domingo Ramos Delgado, his disciple. He made transformations to the forceps, the Tarnier basiotribe and the Farabeuf pelvimeter. He contributed a new pelvimeter and a new procedure for open symphysiotomy. He also belonged to numerous scientific institutions in Europe and America⁴.

This unique professor of obstetrics worked at the Havana university for 30 years and some of his former medical students identify him as an exceptional professor. Such is the case of Dr. Aurelio Serra Pérez, who expressed: *«He was one of the good professors who, when heard, the text served almost only for review. He was an educator, not only did he explain clearly, but he physically "embedded" the subject in us, repeating those essential points...it was somewhat theatrical. He enjoyed giving his classes»*^{11,12}.

To his time he contributed innovative pedagogical techniques that deposed memorization and verbalism. He taught his students the mechanisms of childbirth on a mannequin that represented the woman in a state of

pregnancy. With a rubber vulva, the students could exercise vaginal touch. He was convinced that for this profession *“you have to know how to feel; without palpation there is no Obstetrics”*. He thoroughly taught the mechanisms of childbirth: engagement, descent and internal rotation. For this reason, Dr. Ortiz, when affirming these words, said that *“he brought us the methods that modified the exercise of obstetric practice: with him it can be said that the teaching of Obstetrics in our nation begins”*^{11,12}. The author of this article considers that, without a doubt, it represents a paradigm of medical education in Cuba, as it manages to perfectly combine care and teaching.

His last activity in public was on the occasion of the reception and evening of the ashes of Julio Antonio Mella, on September 29, 1933, where in the honor guard together with his partner Juan Marinello he faced the repressive forces of the government of Grau San Martín and the head of the army, Colonel Fulgencio Batista. This was one more example of his courage and patriotism^{6,11}.

In his valuable bibliography as a man of science, the monographs stand out: “Progress of contemporary Obstetrics in France. Teachings of Professor A. Pinard” (1891), “Clinical study of forceps in the inferior strait” (1891), “Symphysiotomy. Sigault (1763), Baudelocque (1776), Pinard (1891)” (1892), “Treatment of cancer of the gravid uterus” (1893), “Diagnosis of vesicular pregnancy” (1895), “Conscious childbirth without pain” (1915), “Obstetric surgery of pelvic strictures” (1917), the important book “Critical history of pelviotomies. Current status, according to the author's practice” (1922), “Symphysiotomy in the curative treatment of pelvic insufficiency” (1924). His contribution as a masterpiece to Cuban historiography was the posthumous book “Two historical conferences” (1935)^{4,11}.

He was 80 years old when he physically said goodbye in Havana on November 23, 1933, as a result of acute pulmonary edema, and already weakened health in his fight against cancer. He was veiled at the Academy of Sciences, since the government of President Grau forced the student organizations of the time to refuse Professor Eusebio Hernández to be veiled in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana, as befitted such a distinguished figure¹¹.

A newspaper of the time commented on his death: *“one of the most conspicuous sons of Cuba died.”* Dr. Eusebio Hernández was an illustrious doctor in life, a brave soldier of the redemptive revolution – in which he acquired the rank of general – and one of the most outstanding men of science in America. Said publication refers to his death, that he was seen lying in a metal box with the serene expression of death on his face, a great patriot who knew how to collaborate in war and peace for the aggrandizement of the Homeland. Two days after his death, his remains were buried in the Colón Necropolis, in a family vault, devoid of the true honors that this exalted son of the nation deserved¹¹.

As part of the posthumous tributes made, countless samples stand out about the meaning of this patriot for all the people and Cuban obstetricians and gynecologists. On January 18, 2009, to commemorate the 156th anniversary of the birth of the illustrious professor and obstetrician, an emotional patriotic-military, scientific and cultural event was held at the „Eusebio Hernández" Gynecology and Obstetric Hospital in Marianao (formerly Maternidad Obrera), organized by the Cuban Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology. There, in addition to recognizing the work carried out for 50 years by specialists and by many others who have contributed to the country showing an infant mortality rate similar to that of many developed countries, it was also propitious for the Doctor of Sciences and Master of Latin American Gynecology and Obstetrics, Professor Ubaldo Farnot Cardoso, will illustrate to all an exact chronology of the patriotic, scientific and educational activity of Eusebio Hernández in the 19th and 20th centuries, which constituted a tribute and remembrance to the Mambí general¹³.

On the 77th anniversary of the death of Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez, the „Enrique Núñez" pavilion of the „Calixto García" Hospital dressed up to perpetuate in Cuban historiography the revolutionary takeover made by the professor of this facility to incorporate him into teaching of obstetrics, a fact that marked a milestone in the history of medical teaching. The ceremony was convened by the Cuban Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the Office of the City Historian, the Historian of the Ministry of Public Health and the Center for Medical-Surgical Research, which unveiled the effigy of Professor Hernández, in steel and based on a original photo of the patriot, made with excellent workmanship and likeness¹⁴.

On January 19, 2011, his remains were transferred to the Pantheon of Veterans of the Wars of Independence in the Colón Necropolis, a request that was proposed to the Historian of the City of Havana, which, given its importance and transcendence, was transmitted to maximum instances of the government, which was approved as a fair honor to the patriot. By immortalizing this fact for national historiography, Dr. Eusebio Leal Spengler, in his final words, expressed: *“By depositing his remains, we feel that we are paying a just tribute and that we are contributing to the Homeland's heroes occupying the center as example and living virtue for future generations”*¹⁵.

Another solemn act in favor of honoring this character was choosing the celebration of the 160th anniversary of his birth in 2013 to highlight the indicators of excellence obtained by the „Eusebio Hernández" Gynecology and Obstetric Hospital. That same year, it was proposed to establish the „Professor Eusebio Hernández" Award for the best research work to be submitted to the competition at the national congresses of the specialty, and to award it

from the XV National Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology in the closing session of these events, as an eternal token of gratitude and tribute^{16,17}. Shortly after solemnizing the 170th anniversary of his birth, this work serves as a tribute to remember the general of three wars and the doctor who became the father of obstetrics in Cuba.

CONCLUSIONS

His distinguished participation in the independence struggles against Spanish rule in Cuba, and being considered for his valuable contributions as the father of Obstetrics in Cuba, are concrete reasons for his impressive life and work.

Knowing and disseminating the career of Dr. Eusebio Hernández Pérez currently represents a work of deep gratitude to such a prestigious personality.

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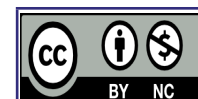
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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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