
Cuban Doctor: First and Foremost Love the Profession

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The greatest satisfaction for a doctor in Cuba is not watching many people suffer like one sees suffering in some places. In all these missions there's great suffering, seeing people without solutions

Julio Cardenal is a through and through Cuban, like cut down by the book of stereotypes: mulatto, funny, outgoing, great people, he likes sharing, even better among friends. All of this when it's not a work day or has any activity with Communist Party to which he belongs proudly even though he is retired. "I am from the breed of Maceo" he says everywhere and he is a doctor, internationalist to complete the perfect description of Cubans who make great the everyday life on this island.

Where does the calling for medicine and pediatrics specifically come from?

"I think I was interested since I was a boy, and I was operating lizards since I was six. Pediatrician because children are unique... in my childhood in the poor Havana neighborhood where I lived I witnessed a lot of tragedy with children, there was no solution for children like there is today, many kids polishing shoes, sick, working and unable to work problems out, as I grew I went to the clinic and met a pediatrician, I saw him take care with so love, and devotion that I thought this is what I want, help children heal, I'll become a pediatrician. "

What led you to Matanzas?

"I fell in love and married a girl from Matanzas, Edda, doctor also, besides she was a student leader and I was sent to head the hospital of Colon, I worked in the department of gastroenterology there, head of Perico, and I got entangled in Matanzas and I stayed here".

After that came many other responsibilities, among them running for a rough time the pediatric hospital of that city and several internationalist missions.

What motivated the unconditional availability?

"I was a Fidel follower since I was a kid, since always, and wherever Fidel sent I went. I harvested coffee in Oriente province; I participated in the literacy campaign, many things. Among the many tasks I performed was taking leaderships in very difficult moments of the country and accomplishing missions regardless the place in year 1976, for example, I left for Yemen with barely twenty-odds. I think this availability depends on each person's personal love, the love to the country, the profession, it's not just talk, it's real, that's how I see it, you can't leave the territory where you were born and who gave you everything you are for money or out of a whim. "

What's the greatest satisfaction for a Cuban Doctor?

"The greatest satisfaction for a doctor in Cuba is not to see suffering so many people, in all those missions I suffer a lot watching people without solutions, where governments can't afford or do not have the possibility of giving enough to solve the problem to the people, that's really shocking, what you see, what you feel, I have photos of children in countries I have been, they are very strong. Cuban doctors have saved many of those kids, that's priceless. Not seeing that here is the greatest satisfaction for a Cuban doctor. "

Have you ever thought of retiring from your profession? Not even in the worst moments of this country?

"Never. The first thing is the calling, most processes of people leaving their jobs is not because of economic reasons but by lack of calling, because they find easier and new paths, they don't put their soul and feeling that takes to be a doctor. Those should have never been doctors, they didn't have vocation of doctors, but as waiters or artisans and I don't blame them. Everyone has in their heads what they believe, but they should have never begun med school, because it's a waste of time for them and an economic loss for the country that trains an individual that when it is almost ripe shifts to a more profitable activity. That is related with their political, ideological, but also human formation, because the doctor is the representation of humanity, our job is to save lives, is the most human vocation, it's very nice to build a bridge, a building and very necessary but it's essential to take care of the human beings and that is true since the tribal healers.

Many justify the abuse or indifference that we sometimes regret at health institutions with the economic limitations suffered by the professionals of the field. How do you see?

"No, that is unjustifiable, is lack of professionalism, dishonesty to yourself. How often we go to work with a thousand problems in our heads, without transport, walking to the hospital, walk in the early morning in the neighborhood, where people know me and love me, because in the time of harsh economic crisis I had lunch at some house and someone else gave me a sandwich, we went through more difficult times than these, no salary raise, for example, and I say nothing justifies the mistreatment to people, regardless if the food is bad, which at some other times it has been worse than now. Most importantly, I repeat, is to have a calling, a sense of what is being a doctor and human being, there some who have great knowledge of medicine, but is a savage; he has no reasoning and heart. Those are the ones who mistreat patients, abandon the ER and when you look deep into it for the reasons why this happen you realize that doing things massively has helped us to help many people, but also hurt us. "

You have taught for most of your 40 years of service and you said you enjoy a lot. Why?

"I had to pay what my teachers did for me. I love teaching is one of the things I still do whenever I can, or need, to deliver a lecture, a conference ... •

What piece of advice would you give to young doctors?

"Choose well what specialty you'll do, because there are some who got it wrong and later they are mad about quitting everything, because I have patients whom I treated and their children. This is a life profession when you are at a pediatric room and hear the screaming of children, the cries or see little children suffering and you know you have to be there, be patient, be polite and stay there because that's your job, you need a lot of love for the profession. The main thing is to love the profession you chose, and give yourself fully to it, because it's about saving lives, the life of your neighbor, your family, your neighbor's life ..."