

Historical review of the graduate program in Gastroenterology at the Faculty of Medicine of the National University of Colombia. Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the first graduating class

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It was the year 1985, after several attempts to convince the academic directors of the National University of Colombia in Bogotá, the Gastroenterology graduate program in the Department of Internal Medicine was finally passed by a vote of the Faculty of Medicine.

The effort was led by the man who was head of the gastroenterology service, Professor Milton Argüello Jiménez, and endorsed by the then head of the Internal Medicine department, the rheumatologist Dr. Mario Peña Cortés.

To locate ourselves and this academic milestone in time, with the that and that, without a doubt, deeply marked our history, we must remember two very important historical events that deeply marked our history that occurred in the month of November of 1988. The first was the bloody takeover of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá by a guerrilla movement followed by its bloody recovery by the Colombian military forces. The second was the colossal tragedy of Armero, Tolima caused by an avalanche that resulted from the melting of the snow cap of the Nevado del Ruiz.



Figure 1. Faculty of Medicine, National University of Colombia. From the Alumni Association of the Faculty of Medicine (2015).

After a long and demanding process of accreditation of the new medical specialty in which the various academic entities of the University intervened, on August 26, 1985 Act 17 of the committee of postgraduate studies of the National University of Colombia embodied the favorable decision of the academic council to design a graduate program in Gastroenterology. The decision was finally embodied in Agreement No. 4 of October 23, 1985. Once these two steps had been completed, the university's superior council created the specialization in Gastroenterology at the National University of Colombia

through Agreement 92 of October 29, 1985. It was signed by the Rector, Dr. Marco Palacios, and the academic secretary, Dr. Lilián Suárez Melo.

I am very aware of the events that took place in 1985, because I was enrolled in the National University of Colombia in my second year of postgraduate studies in Internal Medicine. Our academic internships were at the well-known Hospital San Juan de Dios in Bogotá which was also known as *Hortúa*. Coincidentally, among the colleagues who studied together in the internal medicine post-graduate program were Dr. Rubén D. Gómez V., Dr. William Otero R., and Dr. Fernando Sierra A. who would also subsequently apply successfully to the new specialty.



Figure 2. Hospital San Juan de Dios in Bogotá. From: Agencia de Noticias Universidad Nacional de Colombia (2014).

While the nascent academic program was being consolidated and structured by the academic entities of the Faculty of Medicine in the second semester 1986, I was already in my third year the Internal Medicine postgraduate program. Then, I received great news from a long awaited call to enroll in the new specialty. Without thinking twice, Dr. Rubén D. Gómez and I answered the call. After satisfactorily completing both the written test and the demanding interview, we received the good news that we had been admitted. Then came the Internal Medicine program's approval process within the University according to the established academic program. In my personal case, this meant that after finishing the academic program of Internal Medicine, I was able to avoid applying to a university in Europe in order to find a program in Gastroenterology, as Dr. Paulo E. Archila advised me at that time.

As it was a new academic program, the first months were a real challenge for professors and the two new postgraduate students alike. It is necessary to remember the important support and academic contributions that the professors of the Gastroenterology service provided. In addition to

the coordination of Professor Milton Argüello, Dr. Óscar Gutiérrez (gastroenterologist), Rafael C. Botero (hepatologist), Édgar Álvarez (endoscopist surgeon) and Elsa Rojas (gastroenterologist) contributed their remarkable experience to structure the program with academic activities and in-person participation.

Some of the more relevant among the first activities were reviews of topics, the academic journal club, scientific discussion groups, mortality meetings in the Department of Internal Medicine, and scientific meetings for presentation and discussion of clinical cases in the departments of Radiology, Pathology and Surgery.

It is important to mention some of the professors from these departments who gave unconditional support to this academic process: Jaime Campos, Pablo Latorre, Agustín Castillo, Luis A. Ángel (Department of Internal Medicine), Jorge Pérez, Everth Ulloa, Germán Morales, Enrique Calvo, Miguel Neira, Carlos Camargo (Department of Radiology), Hernán Camargo, Susana de Onatra, Odilio Méndez, Hernán Alvarado, Benito Serrano (Department of Pathology), Jaime de la Hoz, Federico Peñalosa, Francisco Buitrago, Enrique Rincón, Augusto Castro, Carlos Ibla, Jorge Ospina and Jaime Solano (Department of Surgery).

Patient care was provided on three fronts: attending to the numerous patients in the outpatient clinic, caring for hospitalized patients in the pavilions of the various specialties, and working in the dynamic emergency service of the Hospital San Juan de Dios.



Figure 3. Gastroenterology Service, Hospital San Juan de Dios, National University of Colombia, 1988. From left to right: Dr. Enrique Ponce de León, Dr. Rubén D. Gómez, Dr. William Otero, Dr. Rafael C. Botero, Dr. Elsa Rojas, Dr. Milton Argüello, Dr. Jaime Campos, Dr. Claudia Jaramillo, Dr. Óscar O. González, Dr. Juan C. Robayo and Dr. Fernando Sierra.

I must admit that it was not an easy task, but such was our motivation that the obstacles that appeared, and they were not just a few, were promptly and satisfactorily resolved.

At that time, the facilities of the Gastroenterology service at the Hospital San Juan de Dios had been recently remodeled. The design included a procedure room, a clinic, a conference room, a library, a laboratory and sampling room, an

office for the head of the service, a nursing room and dressing room. In terms of equipment and accessories, there was a fiberglass endoscope and colonoscope, a rigid esophagoscope for extraction of foreign bodies, a laparoscope and a rigid rectosigmoidoscope. We had a fiber optic accessory for teaching that had been provided by the Pneumology service. Without it, the learning process would have been very difficult. The program began the process of requesting acquisition of a video endoscope, but as is well known, these processes can be very slow in state institutions. In this case, the process was so slow that the video endoscope still had not arrived by the time I finished the program.

Since 1988 the National University of Colombia has graduated the following specialists in Gastroenterology:

- Rubén D. Gómez V.
- Óscar O. González V.
- Patricia Álvarez
- William Otero R.
- David Páramo
- Fernando Sierra A.
- Enrique Ponce de León
- Juan C. Robayo H.
- Adriana Pardo
- Claudia Jaramillo
- Jaime Daza
- Julián D. Martínez
- Juan C. Molano
- Jorge I. Lizarazo
- Gustavo Portela
- Ricardo Amaya
- Rolando Ortega
- Carlos M. Escobar
- Mauricio Melo
- Héctor Cardona
- John Prieto
- Jorge Ceballos
- Alfredo Cienfuegos
- Benedicto Velasco
- Ignacio Villanueva
- Martín A. Gómez
- Ángel A. Castro
- Martha Rosas
- Elías Forero
- Diego Aponte
- Diego Jiménez
- Mauricio González
- Lidsay Delgado
- Óscar Angarita
- Alejandro Concha
- Diana Garzón
- Javier Riveros
- Lina Otero



Figure 4. Mosaic of the first graduating class of gastroenterologists in 1988

- Cristina Melgar
- James Yurgaki
- Óscar Ruiz
- Andrés Jaramillo
- Andrés Gómez
- Xiomara Ruiz
- Elkin Romero
- Hernando Marulanda
- Javier Estarita

This September 22, 2018 marks the 30th anniversary of the 1988 graduation of the first gastroenterologists from the National University of Colombia. I must say that all became successful medical specialists, many have directed Gastroenterology and Digestive Endoscopy Services in important hospitals and clinics throughout the country. Some have coordinated graduate programs in public and private universities, and still others have presided over directed the scientific associations of the digestive system. In general, all care for patients to offer solutions to their illnesses, and this is always done ethically and with academic sufficiency. We have taken our specialty to almost every place in this country while maintaining the highest academic and professional standards.

Since its creation, the postgraduate program in Gastroenterology has had three coordinators. Dr. Óscar Gutiérrez succeeded Dr. Milton Argüello, and currently Dr. William Otero holds that position. Doctors Martín Gómez and Luis A. Ángel complete the postgraduate teaching staff.

With the closure of the Hospital San Juan de Dios in 2001, ordered by the national and district governments, a political decision that is still controversial, there was an evident difficulty due to the lack of a proper site to guarantee both teaching and patient care. After several years, the University Hospital of the National University of Colombia located in the National Administrative Center (CAN) in the city of Bogotá was finally inaugurated. It is located in the building where the well-recognized Clinic of the National Pension Fund, another institution which the national government also closed in 1995, once functioned. After profound architectural restructuring adhering to requirements for authorization of its operation and including installation of modern infrastructure and medical equipment of the latest technology, the University Hospital opened under the direction of Dr. Raúl Sastre. It now fulfills the requirements of the entire academic and internship process of our academic program.

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