

## HISTORICAL VIGNETTE JAVIER ARIAS STELLA

### A South American Virchow

Among pathologists of the Twentieth Century, few have had as remarkable career as Javier Arias Stella. After describing the now famous Arias-Stella reaction during his Fellowship training at Memorial Hospital in 1954, he went on to make many other contributions to pathology and to the economic and political life of his homeland, Peru. In its wide variety of accomplishments, Arias Stella's life bears a striking resemblance to that of the great Nineteenth Century pathologist, Rudolf Virchow. Besides defining many of the fundamentals of modern pathology, Virchow also strived to promote the welfare of his fellow citizens through active involvement in the politics of his day.

Javier Arias Stella was born in Lima, Peru in 1924. He obtained his medical degree from the Universidad Nacional de San Marcos (Lima) in 1951. Shortly thereafter he embarked on a Kellogg Foundation sponsored three-year fellowship with Dr. Fred Stewart at Memorial Hospital in New York. He brought with him two cases in which endometrial biopsies diagnosed as malignant led to hysterectomies showing no evidence of invasive endometrial cancer. They were associated, however, with an ectopic pregnancy and a hydatidiform mole. His teachers in Peru assured him that these associations were coincidental. Arias Stella suspected a relationship to hormonal stimulation but could find no literature on the subject. He had hoped that Dr. Stewart would enlighten him. Instead, the famous American pathologist was baffled and recommended that the young fellow should undertake a project to study the origin of these changes. Using archival material at Memorial, Arias Stella published his landmark paper on endometrial atypia associated with the presence of chorionic tissue in 1954.

In 1956 Arias Stella returned to Peru and by 1969 became a full professor in the Department of Pathology at the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, a post which he has held with periodic interruptions up to the present day. In addition to elucidating further the nature of the "Arias Stella" reaction using animal models, he made many other lesser known contributions to pathology over the next 40 years. These included the pathology of high altitude cardiopulmonary disease and studies of a variety of infections and neoplastic diseases.

Early in his career, Arias Stella became politically active and with the election of his political party became the Minister of Health from 1963 to 1965 and again from 1967 to 1968. During this time he oversaw the construction of 23 new hospitals and brought fresh water to 400 rural villages. In 1968 his party lost power and his subsequent opposition to the military junta led to a brief period of imprisonment and then exile in Argentina and Venezuela. After several years his party regained power and called upon him to be Foreign Minister from 1980 to 1983. In 1982, he was part of a negotiation team that sought, unsuccessfully, to avoid a military confrontation between Great Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. From 1983 to 1985 Arias Stella became his country's representative at the United Nations and from 1984 to 1985 served as President of the Security Council. During this period in New York, the Memorial Pathology Department made an office and microscope available to him so he could remain in touch with pathology and pursue small research projects.

It is most appropriate that in 1991, shortly after the death of Dr. Fred Stewart at the age of 96, Javier Arias Stella became the recipient of the Fred W. Stewart Award granted by the Pathology Department at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Dr. Arias Stella continues to thrive at the Pathology Institute he founded in Lima in 1987. The Instituto Arias Stella offers anatomic pathology consultations and molecular diagnostic services. In view of his many contributions to pathology and to his country a Peruvian postage stamp was issued in his honor in 2009. A similar honor was bestowed on Rudolf Virchow in Germany in the 1950's (see below).



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### **Bibliography**

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