



Josep Brugada

PROFESSOR OF CARDIOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA

SENIOR CARDIOLOGY
CONSULTANT, HOSPITAL
CLÍNIC DE BARCELONA

HEAD OF THE PEDIATRIC
ARRHYTHMIA DEPARTMENT,
HOSPITAL SANT JOAN DE DÉU,
BARCELONA

He never thought he would become Chief Medical Officer of the Hospital Clínic of the University of Barcelona, the same school where he earned his medical degree in 1981. But, 27 years later, he did. It was not planned. He had not even imagined he would become a doctor.

Still, in medicine, Josep discovered a world that so enthralled him that it propelled him to the very top. He finished his studies one 4th July. The next day, he was working as a family doctor in Maçanet de la Selva. Soon after, by taking his civil service entrance exams –the last to be held for doctors in Spain– he earned a stable position as a family doctor in Riudarenes. Two hours of work a day, and a decent wage. One day, he was visited by two former classmates who were studying in France at the time. They convinced him to take the entrance exams for cardiology in Montpellier. After brushing up on his French, he managed to pass the test.

Then, four years later, he passed the exam that made him a cardiologist. He was one of only eight to pass. 300 had taken the exam. After completing his speciality, he received an offer from Spain to return to his native Girona. At the same time, he was given a chance to focus on scientific research in the Dutch city of Maastricht. In the end he opted for the latter and was re-united with his older brother. For four more years, he combined basic research in clinical and experimental electrophysiology with patient care. Together with Pedro, who at that time was already a world-renowned electrophysiologist, he set off on the path that would lead to the discovery of the Brugada syndrome. His surname began to be come up in conferences on cardiology all over the world. As a result of this effort, in his third year in Holland he was made a researcher at the Royal Netherlands

Academy of Arts and Sciences. However, one day he got a call from the Hospital of the Montreal Heart Institute. That same week, he got another call from Barcelona, from the Hospital Clínic. That was when Josep remembered why he had left home he decided to start his speciality. He had wanted to one day work at the Hospital Clínic. In pursuit of his original goal, in 1991 he returned to Barcelona, where he was to remain. Josep's career continued to be marked by awards and achievements. Sudden cardiac death began to gain more and more importance in his life, together with what would come to be called the Brugada syndrome a few years later. Together with Pedro, he had published a series of cases of patients who had recovered from sudden cardiac arrest and who had a special electrocardiogram. Several years later, they attended to an Italian family of nine with the same alteration in their electrocardiogram. A blood sample from each member of the family was sent to Ramon –who was in the United States at the time, researching cardiovascular genetics– so he could analyse it. The first genetic mutation to explain the Brugada syndrome had been discovered. Soon after, this congenital alteration would bear his name.

When he was made a member of management at the Hospital Clínic in Barcelona, Josep's only condition was that he be allowed to continue his work at Sant Joan de Déu. He has spent 20 years at the Catalan hospital, directing the most important paediatric arrhythmia department in Spain –which he himself established– the only centre recognized by the Ministry. There, he works with his niece, Georgia, a paediatric cardiologist. Both receive the most complicated cases in the country, and these are the patients that most stimulate their work as cardiologists. In 2002, the doctor carried out an excision on the smallest newborn in the world, born prematurely after only 32 weeks of gestation, because it suffered from uncontrollable intrauterine tachycardia. When Josep treated the infant, it weighed just over a kilo and a half. Today, the child is 16 years old. Josep continues treating hundreds of patients each year, both children and adults, using the most sophisticated techniques for curing tachycardia and heart arrhythmia. His other passion is sharing all of this knowledge with younger generations. Every year, he receives a good handful of cardiologists from all around the world who want to learn his techniques for diagnosis and treatment. Over the years, he has trained over 200 specialists. Many of them now lead arrhythmia units all around the world, and they have Josep's mark on their way of working and treating patients.

The doctor's final facet is his humanitarian side. For years, Josep has regularly travelled to Africa 3 or 4 times a year to treat the disadvantaged. In Aswan (Egypt) or Maputo (Mozambique) he treats dozens of children with arrhythmia. He brings mobile systems with him that allow him to work under conditions that are often complicated, and he always has the hope of being able to help those who, under other circumstances, would have no possibility for treatment.