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Giants in Urology

Dr. Octavio Castillo—Pioneer of Urolaparoscopy

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It was November 2003 in the city of Rosario, Argentina. Dr. Octavio Castillo was giving a plenary on laparoscopic urology. You could hear a pin drop in the room while everyone's attention was on him. And it was no wonder: at that time, laparoscopy in urology was in its infancy, but Dr. Castillo was well ahead of his time with the techniques he had developed.

I was in the room that day as a young resident. When he got off the stage, I eagerly waited until it was my turn to have a word with him. I simply told him, "I want to be like you when I grow up", to which he replied, "Finish up your residency and come visit me".

And that's how I met my mentor, a person from whom I would learn more than just laparoscopy. But this is not my story; it is his.

Dr. Octavio Castillo was born on 9 October 1955, in Talca, a small town 255 km south of Santiago de Chile. Son of Octavio de Jesús Castillo Valenzuela and Elsa Laura Aída Cádiz Coppia, he grew up in that same town and, after finishing high school, moved to Santiago. Being from a humble household, he was the first in his family to go to college, and from 1973 to 1979, he studied medicine at the "Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile". He later entered a surgical residency from 1980 to 1983. After that, he started his urology residency. By 1985, he was a urologist.

In 1987, he moved to Rochester, Minnesota, to pursue a visiting fellow program at the Mayo Clinic, where he came into contact with a high-end urology department and developed the idea of what he wanted to create when he returned home.

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His stay at the Mayo Clinic was a bittersweet experience, with very lonely moments and a homesick feeling that he would later remember. During that time, he promised himself that he would never let someone else feel the same way if he ever got the chance to help. And many chances he has had, as numerous visiting residents and fellows have stayed with him through the years. I can attest that during my two-year stay as a fellow, Dr. Castillo made sure that none of his visitors felt alone or out of place. He always made everyone feel welcome and cared for.

But let us get back to his story. After returning to Chile, Dr. Castillo became a part of the Department of Urology at Clínica Santa María in Santiago de Chile. There, he would develop all his laparoscopic techniques. Just to put things into perspective, the first report of a laparoscopic nephrectomy was published by Clayman et al. in 1991, and all of Dr. Castillo's techniques were self-taught.

In 1992, Dr. Castillo performed his first laparoscopic varicocelectomy, pelvic lymphadenectomy, and radical nephrectomy. Just a year later, he performed his first laparoscopic adrenalectomy and, subsequently, his first laparoscopic partial nephrectomy, laying the groundwork for the first laparoscopic urology training program in Chile and the region. By the year 2000, he was performing laparoscopic radical prostatectomies and cystectomies.

By this time, he had caught the attention of the international urological community. He became a beacon in an evolving field. During the next 20 years, he would travel around the world, lecturing on laparoscopic urology and performing countless live demonstrations.

For that, he was granted honorary membership in the Argentinean, Dominican, Peruvian, Colombian, Panamanian, and Caribbean Societies of Urology. He also received the title of Honorary Professor of the Global Robotics Institute in Celebration, FL, USA. In 2010, he was awarded the highest recognition from the Spanish Society of Urology, the Francisco Díaz Medal. In 2019, he received the Distinguished Career Award from the Société Internationale d'Urologie (SIU). In 2021, he was granted the Shlomo Raz Medal by the American Confederation of Urology (CAU), the most prestigious award that can be obtained from the CAU. Later, in 2023, he received the Federico Texo Medal, the highest award granted by the Argentine Society of Urology.

Between 2008 and 2009, he created the first Chilean fellowship in endourology and laparoscopy accredited by the Endourological Society and the SIU.

In 2009, he launched the first Chilean robotic program at Clínica Indisa in Santiago de Chile.

Later, he also created another robotic program at Clínica Andes Salud in Concepción, one of the three largest cities in Chile. He also actively participated in the development of new robotic systems.

During his career, Dr. Castillo, or as everyone knows him, "Octavio", has trained hundreds of visiting urologists. And as the saying goes, "You shall be known by your fruit", and many of Octavio's disciples have become renowned leaders in the field.

With more than 300 publications and countless awards, both national and international, Dr. Castillo remains at the forefront of his field. He is still the tireless, hardworking surgeon who trained me. However, wisdom comes with age, and nowadays, he takes more time to enjoy life by traveling with his wife and spending time with friends.

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