
Editorial

Tribute to Robert W. Kerwin (1955-2007)

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This text is intended to serve as tribute to the important contribution of the British scientist Robert William Kerwin, recently deceased, to Psychiatry in Brazil in general, and more specifically to the Department and Institute of Psychiatry of the *Hospital das Clínicas da Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de São Paulo* (IPQ-HC-FMUSP).

In the history of Psychiatry of our times, Rob Kerwin will be surely remembered as one of the greatest names of the movement that led, from the 1980's, to a notable flourishing of the application of neurosciences to the investigation of the pathophysiology and treatment of mental disorders, using the emerging techniques of molecular biology, neuroimaging and others.

In the beginning of his career in the medical sciences, Rob Kerwin acquired a solid scientific background in pharmacology, including a Ph.D. degree obtained in the University of Bristol at the age of 25, in 1980. In 1988, Rob completed his training in Psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital of the University of London. In a meteoric ascension, he reached only two years later the posts of Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry and Neuroscience at the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP) of the University of London, and Consultant Psychiatrist at the Maudsley Hospital.

At that time, more precisely in April 1990, Rob made his first travel to Brazil. This visit took place as part of the interchange programme organized by our Professors Valentim Gentil Filho and José Roberto de Albuquerque Fortes, whereby visits of both British scientists to São Paulo and of professionals from our IPQ-HC-FMUSP to the IoP in London were financed over a period of 5 years, with support from the British Council and São Paulo State's funding agency (Fapesp). During a stay of almost 20 days with us, Rob gave courses on the neurochemistry and pharmacology of psychoses with depth and didacticism, and discussed a number of research projects with our professionals, always with patience and courtesy. At a time when the neurosciences were still very timidly valued by Brazilian psychiatrists, the first ever visit of a top class psychopharmacologist like Rob had a great impact among us. Even Rob felt touched by the way he was greeted here, and he committed himself to encourage the training of our professionals in the application of novel neuroscientific techniques to research in Psychiatry.

In the context of his interest to help our IPQ-HC-FMUSP, Rob Kerwin gave the privilege to me and to Dr. Valéria Bigliani, both recently trained in the psychiatric residence program of our institution, to be directly supervised by him in Ph.D. degree courses at the University of London. During those years of training, it became clear that Rob was conscious of the importance to send back to Brazil psychiatrists ready to work independently in research areas still little explored in our country. Thus the supervision received from him transcended the limits of the simple confection of Ph.D. theses; he instigated us to move back to Brazil avid and confident to inaugurate novel research fields, and to engage in the quest to solidify two fundamental habits here: the regular production of articles for publication in international periodicals of high impact reporting the results of our studies; and the submission of research grants to funding agencies both from Brazil and abroad, to ensure the continuity of our studies.

During the following years in London, Rob continued to lead a highly productive group of researchers dedicated to the application of functional neuroimaging, genetic, molecular biology and *post-mortem* neurochemical techniques to the investigation of several different kinds of mental disorders. The academic-scientific contributions of Rob's team led him to achieve, with little more than 40 years, two positions of great prestige: the chair of Clinical Neuropharmacology at the IoP, and the headship of the Department of Clinical Pharmacology of Kings College School of Medicine and Dentistry of the University of London.

After his memorable initial visit to Brazil in 1990, Rob traveled to our country three other times, accepting our invitations to take part in conferences organized in São Paulo. At the time of the last of those visits, in April 2002, even though he was fighting to recover his best physical form, he did not hesitate to honor his commitment to attend the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of our IPQ-HC-FMUSP, and proffered the opening lecture of the cycle of conferences celebrated over the year.

Having followed Rob Kerwin's brilliant trajectory and having benefited from his teachings over several years, I can testify that the burden of the responsibilities that came with his professional success never obscured his scientific enthusiasm, generosity, care for the young scientists at the beginning of their careers, and sharp focus on the research topics with greatest potential to bring practical benefits to the sufferers of psychiatric disorders. These attributes made Rob a great scientist and a great man, and it is for these reasons that he will be always remembered with great esteem, admiration and gratitude at our institution.