

**MEDICINA
UNIVERSITARIA**www.elsevier.es/rmuanl

VOICES OF DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

It's the academia, dummy! or when quantity supersedes quality

**H.A. Barrera-Saldaña**

Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine, School of Medicine at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico

Received 3 November 2015; accepted 16 December 2015

Available online 10 May 2016

Many of us, faculty members dedicated to the profession of university professor, began our professional careers investing the best years of our youth in academically preparing ourselves in the best way possible. We continued our careers by searching for a renowned institution to work for. Its prestige provided us with a solid foundation for quick growth, thus reaching the top of the academic hierarchy, making us feel that we made the best investment for our future. Since it is our responsibility to prepare ourselves, it is also our responsibility to make sure this preparation bears the best fruit for society and our families. But also, we aspire to heighten our prestige, even a little, so that at the dusk of our professional life we can feel the satisfaction of having accomplished our mission in society and be rewarded with the appreciation and respect of our colleagues (which results in sincere affection), who we also respect and admire, and fulfill the debt to our family who supported us and sacrificed so much for our eagerness to pursue professional success, a success that has only one noble goal: academic excellence.

The strive for success

Although there are different "roads and recipes" that we and our colleagues use in the search for excellence in our field, and the pride that this brings to our institution, all successful institutions, at least in the real-world of academia,

must rise above politics (academic excellence is the objective, and politics should be only a means to this end). Both share similarities, such as taking risky actions, being extremely demanding of sacrifice, having generally little or no help, often being questioned, and at other times being envied and even worse, boycotted.

The successful colleague at an academic level is usually the result of accomplished dreams, ambitions, and an exceptional dedication of time and effort. Naturally, it is common that these actions challenge and clash with conformism, ignorance, and the mediocrity that prevails in bureaucratic environments, without giving proper importance to academic merit. This bureaucracy is incapable of understanding the meaning of academia, let alone its excellence, forgets to serve and ends up taking advantage of and, in some cases, rejecting academia. In fact, it is common to see regrettable and dishonorable situations at our institutions. Abuse of authority by people within the bureaucracy who do not cultivate tolerance, let alone self-criticism, motivated by clashes when academics explode against them, fueled by desperation as a result of the incomprehension and indifference with which their incompetence condemns the generations that attend our institutions and their programs to build a better future. It does not come as a surprise to anyone, especially not to the author, the capital sin in our society that is deeply entrenched in human behavior, which reflects an unhealthy and unmatched joy to see one tries to excel, fail. Moreover, what is sadder is that there are sins by omission of the faculty in the face of onslaughts of bureaucracy toward academics who think and act freely; those whose example and

E-mail address: habarrera@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rmu.2015.12.003>

1665-5796/© 2016 Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. Published by Masson Doyma México S.A. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

wisdom show us just how wrong we are in not solidarizing to resist the clashes of interests unrelated to our own noble task among society.

Victory after the battle

But, for the few who come out victorious after these never-ending battles, battles that excellence and transcendence wish to fight, the noble reward awaiting them is a renewed and strengthened program in the three "arenas" where these battles take place: *teaching*, *research* and *care*. What a satisfaction it is to create significant reforms to an undergraduate program or even better, a completely new graduate program that, because of its quality, helps to improve the working opportunities of the many professionals who end up studying these programs! What an enormous pride it is to contribute to mankind, however modest a discovery or an invention may be! How gratifying it is to bring to the patient's hospital bed a new diagnosis or treatment that will help him/her recover, in the same way that innovation, as in a Mexican company, increases the company's competitiveness! These are the rewards that dedication and commitment to excellence may yield to the professors willing to pursue the difficult route of excellence. And this is only possible in an institution like ours, when, without being perfect, the professor is clear about his/her duty to lead the search for greater health and wellness for our fellow citizens.

Quantity no, excellence yes

Many of the disagreements between institutional bureaucracy (or that of the government) and academia that is truly free, committed, proactive, and a zealous defender of reason, arise when the institution intends to impose programs which the institution supports as a measure of success of academia, criteria that benefit quantity over quality. Let us not fool ourselves, quantity can never replace quality. On the contrary, it sacrifices it. However, Even though it is true that learning always takes place, we must not dream that illuminated outsiders will come to save us. On the contrary, they will come, not to make us better, but to make us like the rest: just good. Why, despite all the effort to meet the indicators of so many programs here and there we cannot make up lost ground? Why does it seem that we are not able to catch up with those who have surpassed us? It is the academia, dummy! The only thing that truly matters and counts in an institution like ours is the academia. Everything else distances us from our essence: *academics that kindle the flame of truth*.

Funding

No financial support was provided.