

My word**Coming home to research in Mexico**
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In 1973, after completing my first course of physiology at the Faculty of Medicine of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), I decided I wanted to become a physiologist. I applied and was accepted to work in a laboratory of neurophysiology. Although the laboratory was fairly well equipped and investigators were reasonably well paid for their work, I realised that I must work in a leading laboratory abroad if I really wanted to pursue my career at home. I therefore completed my medical studies, and went to Jacques Glowinski's laboratory at Collège de France in Paris to work on neurochemistry.

At the Collège de France I collaborated with fellows from several countries in a real international environment. To my relief, I found that there was nothing magic in achieving some success: hard work and a good adviser were very important ingredients. Over three years, I obtained a doctorat d'état and published a considerable number of papers. I felt I was now ready to return to Mexico and set up my own laboratory. However, two things made me reconsider. First, I found that I could not continue the work I had been doing in France because neurochemistry was too expensive and I knew that getting supplies from abroad would be time consuming. And, secondly, there were no positions available in Mexico.

I therefore considered neurophysiology because I knew that it would be a more practical option back home and there were many interesting developments. I was very fortunate in meeting Wolfram

Schultz of the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, who was looking for a postdoctoral fellow. I moved to Wolfram's laboratory and learnt neurophysiology under his guidance and obtained some interesting results. After this, I knew that I could set up my own laboratory in Mexico and that my research could meet international standards. Still, however, no positions were open in Mexico. I considered the possibility that, after a short period of time in the US, it might be more easy to negotiate my return to Mexico. So I wrote to Vernon Mountcastle at the Johns Hopkins University. Vernon replied that he was planning retirement but that he would take me on as his last postdoc. So I moved to Baltimore, full of excitement.

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The Baltimore laboratory was state-of-the-art in systems neurophysiology and Vernon liked to carry out experiments himself. We worked together and I learnt a lot. During this period, I developed some ideas that I wanted to explore when I returned to Mexico. But, still there were no positions. However, something unexpected happened. Nancy Carrasco from Albert Einstein College, a friend of my wife, came to Baltimore. Before leaving, she asked me about my plans. I told her that my intention was to return to Mexico but so far it had not been possible. She left for New York.

Next day Vernon and I were doing an experiment and a phone call came from Mexico City. It was from Antonio Peña, the former professor of Nancy, who was director of the Instituto de Fisiología Celular (IFC), UNAM. He told me that Nancy had called him and he asked me to fax my CV. Shortly after, Peña called again to say that I was accepted in his Institute!

My family and I arrived to Mexico City in the fall of 1989. After many years of training in Mexico, Europe and the States, I had the opportunity to carry out my own research. Although I held the rank of full professor of neuroscience at the IFC-UNAM, my initial salary was low, but Peña managed to provide me with the indispensable financial support to set up. The problem of establishing my family was solved by the generous award of the 1990 International Demuth Prize for Young Neuroscience Investigators, based in Bern, Switzerland. With that money our family could survive the first year. Vernon was afraid I might be lost in Mexico so, before his retirement, he invited to me to spend one week or two every two months in Baltimore to complete some experiments. This helped keep me closely in touch.

Another important fact was that the Howard Hughes Medical Institute launched an international program of financial support for researchers in Canada and Mexico. I was fortunate to receive funding and invested it all in building up the laboratory that I had always dreamed of. As a happy coincidence, salaries and financial support dramatically improved in Mexico. This has allowed to me to carry on experiments in behaving monkeys, which since 1993 have generated some interesting results in the neurobiology of perception.

I consider myself fortunate. First, even in the worst moments of my career, I received strong support from my family and my mentors and I have never considered myself a second-class investigator because of my location. But, what motivated to me to pursue a scientific career in Mexico? I simply considered that from Mexico I could do my best.

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