

## Opening Speech of the 2021 Presidency of the Argentine Society of Cardiology

### *Discurso inaugural de la Presidencia de la Sociedad Argentina de Cardiología 2021*

Authorities of the Argentine Society of Cardiology, colleagues, family, and friends,

It is a true privilege and a great honor for me to assume the Presidency of the Argentine Society of Cardiology. Of course, it is an enormous responsibility that I hope I will be able to carry out, and I thank you for this opportunity.

My confidence is based on the fact that I am assuming the Presidency of a Society with solid foundations, an impeccable 83-year record, a responsible staff, and in which we have created a workforce with people who have already demonstrated their sense of belonging and high level of commitment to the Society.

This year we have faced huge challenges, and I would like to thank the 2020 Board of Directors for everything I have learned, and very specially to José Luis Navarro Estrada, who has been extremely focused on his work and knew how to handle the new difficulties that arose with great skill.

I believe it is important to share with you my story and my career. As regards to my family, my father, Joseph, was a Polish Jewish survivor of the Shoah. His family had been victims of the genocide. Years later, after the war ended, he learned that one of his sisters had survived and was living in Buenos Aires, so he decided to come and join her again.

He settled in Argentina, became a natural citizen, and adopted this land as his own. He met my mother, Juana, and together they started a family.

Perhaps the most important values my parents passed on to my sister and me were study, work, honesty, and solidarity. At her 89 years of age, my mother – here present- actively collaborates as a volunteer in the Tzedaká Foundation, a charity organization. For this, I will be eternally grateful to them.

Regarding my professional career, I was trained as a physician at the University of Buenos Aires and I completed my residency at Hospital Durand, where I later served as chief resident, trainer, and staff physician in cardiology.

Undoubtedly, one of the first references was Dr. Beatriz Abuín de León, chief of the hospital ward, a woman of admirable energy and dedication. In the inpatient ward, patients had to wait weeks or months for urgent cardiovascular surgery. One of the memories that impacted me the most was that one day, when I was a resident, Dr. Abuín told me: "Come with me, Alejandro, these people can't wait any longer." We

went to Sanatorio Güemes in her Renault 4, where Dr. René Favaloro was waiting for us.

We told him about one of our patients' problem, and he said: "Bring him here as soon as possible." In the afternoon, I went back to Sanatorio Güemes, this time in an ambulance with the patient, who promptly underwent surgery. Due to the success of this procedure, we repeated it on several occasions. This is how I met Dr. Favaloro, who performed these procedures for free. I must confess that Dr. Abuín's courage and Dr. Favaloro's generosity touched me, and left an imprint that gave meaning to my professional perspective.

I also owe to Dr. Abuín my joining the SAC, when I was still a resident, in the Council of Clinical Cardiology, of which I became its director.

It was 1992, and one day, Mariela, my wife, showed me a notice in the newspaper announcing that a competition was opening for the post of Chief Resident at the new seat of the Favaloro Foundation. My first reaction was: Chief Resident? Again? Being already a staff physician at the hospital? While at first I had some doubts, I finally decided to accept the challenge of joining a new institution, with some uncertainties, but also eager for a new opportunity.

That is how I started working at the Favaloro Foundation, where I was appointed staff physician in the hospitalization area the next year. In 2000, I moved to the outpatient area, and in 2006, I was appointed Chief of Outpatient Cardiology.

So, I have been part of this institution for 28 years, which is, undoubtedly, my second home. I remember many of those who were my teachers: Dr. José Martínez Martínez, who, in those early years, conveyed us the need for reading and constant updating; Dr. Luis Suarez, unquestionably a champion of semiology and ECG diagnosis; and the visionary Dr. Kike Gurfinkel.

But Dr. Favaloro was definitely a great reference in terms of his principles of honesty and work with passion and effort. He always avoided being influenced by his own or others' dogmatic concepts or prejudices. He continually emphasized never deviating from ethics, and humbly understand the need to work as a team.

Every time the Doctor put his hand on his patients' shoulder, he showed that humane and respectful treatment represents an important part of their healing process.

My chiefs and colleagues were also my teachers throughout these years, sharing countless moments:

on-call passes, workshops, courses, always focusing on training and with a patient-centered, ethical approach. I would like to thank them all, especially Horacio Casabé and Julio Figal; who have been with me since the beginning of the Foundation and for whom I feel a deep affection, admiration and respect.

I am certainly being unfair, because I could name many more who were by my side in my professional growth, and helped me stand in this position today. I would also like to recognize Oscar Méndiz, Head of the Institute of Cardiology and Cardiovascular Surgery at the Favaloro Foundation, and Matías Fosco, Medical Director of the Foundation, for their constant support. I am grateful to Liliana Favaloro, President of the Foundation, and to all the authorities of the institution, for turning it into a place of excellence, in which I feel very comfortable working. I also wish to express my gratitude to Roberto Favaloro, with whom twice a week we see patients in adjoining offices and discuss with passion and enthusiasm, but always prioritizing respect for the dignity and human condition of patients.

I am also deeply grateful for the successive generations of residents and students, some of them now colleagues, from whom I have learned and who have nurtured me over the years. My sincere and warm appreciation to all of them.

With respect to my career in the SAC, I participated in different areas: director of the Council of Clinical Cardiology; coordinator of the Councils Area; and member of the Consensus Area together with Ricardo Iglesias, who later invited me to be part of the Board of Directors as assistant secretary. Once my term was over, Carlos Barrero appointed me as General Coordinator of the Scientific Committee for the 2011 SAC Congress, which was a very enriching experience. Later on, Jorge Lerman invited me to join him at the Argentine Foundation of Cardiology, where we worked together to apply and improve ways of reaching out to the community. Then, Guillermo Fábregues invited me to join the Districts Area, where we had the opportunity to organize two memorable and successful conferences, in Junín and Bahía Blanca. Together, we have shared countless talks discussing ideas about the SAC, and it was Guillermo who thought that I could take this place. He has been a mentor, my essential support and guide. For him, too, my deepest gratitude.

My project is that of an open, inclusive and federal Society.

Regarding the educational aspect, it will be oriented to increasing the number of all SAC courses and careers with the aim of reaching more people in the most diverse places of our country. Since the Consortium with the South American Society, we have had an opportunity to grow in other Latin American countries because, so far, we are the only country that has offered its courses.

A great number of colleagues access this proposal

through social networks, tools that still have a large margin to be exploited. Webinars will continue, following the 2020 impact as a communication tool and source of income; Wikicardio, a high-level resource for the community, will also continue growing.

I am interested in attracting new members, especially young people, and those who are underrepresented today, such as people who work in public hospitals and in the interior of the country. SAC Young Community will play a significant role in this regard. I am committed to increase the number of full members to ensure generational renewal, maintain the scientific level, and build a more sustainable SAC.

We will encourage original research projects and seek contributions to reward them. We will continue with all the ongoing registries that allow us to have our own statistics, showing part of our reality. Communication through the Area of Instructional Resources (ARI) and the recently redesigned website will be central to our project.

The relationship with the SAC País districts is a key aspect of my strategic plan. Definitely, the development of "virtuality" has shortened distances; thus, we have witnessed the incredible organizational capacity of many colleagues, the huge energy they have put into the SAC, and their sense of belonging. They have developed activities of the highest level in a very short time, with prestigious national and international guests. For that reason, my message is that they should be incorporated and integrated into the SAC structure to make it as federal as possible. To this end, I have decided that three of the four members that have been renewed should come from the districts. In this way, of the eight members of the Board of Directors today, six represent the SAC País districts.

In addition, the Technical Secretary of the Scientific Committee of the next Argentine Congress of Cardiology will be, for the first time, a representative of the districts. With the advance of "virtuality", and as we are improving our streaming quality, more district representatives will also be able to join the scientific councils and other SAC areas.

In the international arena, the SAC has experienced substantial growth, which was crowned when Dr. Alvaro Sosa Liprandi assumed the Presidency of the Interamerican Society of Cardiology (IASC) and, this year, when Dr. Daniel Piñero was elected President of the World Heart Federation (WHF), a fact that has filled us with joy.

I will continue to support the policy of joint activities with the Argentine Federation of Cardiology and other national societies requiring it.

In 2020, we started organizing the SAC Congress and the Congress of Echocardiography and Cardiovascular Imaging in an in-person format; however, as the pandemic continued, we had to change to a virtual modality. In 2021, we will organize them in a virtual format, taking advantage of the experience we have gained, and we hope that, if coronavirus is beaten, we

will be able to return to an in-person format.

The Argentine Journal of Cardiology, forerunner of the SAC and of unquestionable scientific quality, will have our full support to continue its growth and achieve the desired indexing.

Integration with the Argentine Foundation of Cardiology, SAC's community arm, is one of the strategic objectives to work on.

Regarding health policies, during 2020 we worked together with the Ministry of Health on clinical practice guidelines for infarction, cardiovascular prevention, hypertension, and stroke. Recently, we were convened together with other scientific societies to work on the ambitious plan to vaccinate a large portion of the population against COVID-19. We have committed to collaborate since one of the roles of a scientific society is to participate, together with the authorities, in improving the health of the population.

As I have mentioned, SAC is progressively growing; therefore, its operation has become extremely complex, which is why we understood that we need a general manager to facilitate the coordination of activities.

From the financial viewpoint, I will try to be as austere as possible to ensure that all projects are sustainable. I do not believe that crisis is a synonym of opportunity; crisis can be opportunity, and it will de-

pend of us. I hope to have balance, tolerance, understanding, critical sense, an open heart, and the support of those who will be with me in this task.

2020 has been a year that has changed us forever. I would like to pay tribute to all the victims of this pandemic, many of them healthcare personnel who worked tirelessly. My deepest and frank acknowledgment to all of them and their families.

I would like to thank the pharmaceutical and medical device industries for their sustained support to our Society in our congresses and different activities carried out.

Finally, my thanks to my daughters, Florencia and Julieta, who chose to become physicians by personal decision. I must confess that seeing them so committed to the study and the profession has boosted, a little, my ego, because they could somehow perceive the love I feel for what I do.

My special thanks go to Mariela, my wife, my love, my accomplice and everything, as the song says, my constant support and advisor, who with her listening, makes me see beyond what is visible to my eyes.

Thank you very much.

**Alejandro R. Hershson**

President of the Argentine Society of Cardiology