

Alberto Peña: Monologues of a pediatric surgeon

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Alberto Peña is one of the best-known pediatric surgeons in the world mainly due to his outstanding contribution to the management of babies born with ano-rectal malformations and cloacae. His scientific and clinical works have been published in all relevant pediatric surgical journals and textbooks. At the present, Alberto Peña has written a very different book: “Monologues by a Pediatric Surgeon”, in which he reflects in a great way about his professional life and the status and position of pediatric surgery and pediatric surgeons today.

In the first part of his book, Alberto Peña describes his way toward embarking on a career in surgery as a very determined young student. He describes how the fate of his unfortunate first son—suffering from an uncorrectable biliary atresia—was finally the stimulus for his decision to become a specialist in pediatric surgery with the desire of helping all children with surgical diseases. His training in pediatric surgery is very impressive. It includes training in Mexico as well as in the Children’s Hospital in Boston. We learn how many famous pediatric surgeons in Boston have been impressed by this hardworking young fellow and supported his career constantly. Later on, he became Chief and Professor of Surgery in Mexico and at Schneider Children’s Hospital in Long Island. Today, Alberto Peña is the Director of the Colorectal Pediatric Center in Cincinnati. Especially interesting in this part of the book is the detailed account of how Peña arrived at the development of the posterior sagittal approach for the treatment of ano-rectal malformations (PSARP), questioning the concept of the puborectalis muscle. Very impressive for young students and prospective pediatric surgeons is his important

advice: always to question opinions and doctrines if they do not correspond with reality or personal surgical experience, without being intimidated by the reputation of professors or world-renowned experts.

In the second part of the book, Peña tells in a very touching way special events with families, mothers and with many unbelievably emotionally strong children, on whom he operated all over the world. In this part of the book, he shows how important it is for pediatric surgeons to have close and personal contact with the families, the mothers to show understanding of the problems and empathy for the children before and after the surgical procedure. Today, this kind of devotion unfortunately comes off badly because of the tiring, demanding daily routine of university hospitals, workload of administrative duties, need to do excellent research and to publish in high impact factor journals.

In the third part of the book, the daily challenges of a pediatric surgeon are very lively described in structured chapters. The numerous problems of the daily clinical routine are discussed with clear insights from Peña’s own experiences. These chapters are especially important for young doctors, as Peña always analyzes causes and consequences very clearly and combines from his experiences these challenges with important and helpful advices.

“Monologues of a Pediatric Surgeon” is not only a book by an eminent surgeon, but also a book of a great teacher and philosophical doctor. It shows impressively how important our specialty is for the community, families and children, and additionally names and analyzes the challenges we have to face and manage in this wonderful profession. The book is recommended not only for the senior and experienced pediatric surgeons, but also for the younger generation of pediatric surgeons.

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