

# In memory of Professor Saulo Klahr

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Dear colleagues, allow me to describe to you a famous nephrologist, a maestro of maestros, whose biography is humble yet brimming with work and teaching deserving of our most heartfelt admiration and gratitude. I am talking about our friend Professor Saulo Klahr who died on 3rd of June at home in St. Louis, capital of the north American state of Missouri, after a long and terrible illness, and surrounded by his beloved family.

A few days ago I read this simple yet powerful headline in an online Columbian newspaper: "Cauca nephrologist dies, a leading figure in United States". These few words captured who he was – a nephrologist doctor who was born in his beloved Colombia and who ended his days in the most advanced country in the world, deservedly considered a leading figure, or "sublime", "outstanding among his peers".

Saulo Klahr was born in 1935 in Santander de Quilichao, in the Cauca region to the South of the Republic of Colombia. From a young age he wanted to become a doctor, and so he moved away to attend the Universidad Nacional de Bogotá, where he achieved his Bachelors Degree at the Faculty of Medicine in 1961. Straight after this he applied to complete his residency and specialism at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and was accepted that same year.

It was there, 2 years later, where he met Eduardo Slatopolsky, who says "from then on he was my friend, my closest friend". Also, at that time he fell head over heels in love with Carol de Clue, a beautiful nurse at the Metabolic Unit, who he married in 1965. Carol was an adorable friend and loyal wife who Saulo has leaned on throughout his life; they worked side by side, and had two sons, James and Robert. Neither followed the same profession as their father, they studied law. Both married and gave their parents four lively little grandchildren to fill the grandparents' home with happiness.

Regarding scientific matters, we can categorically state that the professional life of Professor Klahr, which he developed entirely at the Renal Division of Washington University Hospital, St. Louis was brilliant and spectacular. Saulo was a brilliant man who had a great ability to work, he was a workaholic with a photographic memory, very meticulous and as Eduardo Slatopolsky says, he was "always prepared". We should remember that when the young Saulo left his home land and arrived at this prestigious and enormous American hospital, the Director of the Renal Division was none other than Neal S. Bricker, a great researcher who developed the "intact nephron hypothesis", which is prestigiously recognised. In only 10 years Saulo Klahr advanced his career from resident doctor to Professor of Medicine and then in 1972

he became Director of this Renal Division, a position he held for 20 years. In 1986 he was named the Joseph Friedman Professor of Renal Diseases in Medicine and in 1991 he became Chair of Medicine at Jewish Hospital in St. Louis.

We would need a lot more time and space to be able list Dr. Klahr's scientific accomplishments. Throughout his life he published more than 500 articles, most of which came from his research investigations, and he wrote around 20 books, most of these dedicated to making it easier to learn about the specialism of first generation of nephrologists in the world. Therefore, when some of us were just beginning our compulsory self-directed study on dialysis and alterations in hydroelectrolytic metabolism the early seventies, faced with the uncertainty of a specialism yet to be born, it was Saulo Klahr's books which helped us most. For some, he was a "long distance maestro".

I had the honour and pleasure of meeting Professor Saulo Klahr in 1980 in Seville. It was during the "Endocrinological Conference" one of the annual meetings arranged by the then Head of Medical Pathology at the Universidad de Sevilla, Professor Antonio Aznar. Our good friend Francisco Llach took part in these meetings, who at the time was at Oklahoma University; every year he would come with very prestigious nephrologist colleagues from the United States to give us very interesting talks on new aspects of the new specialism. I fondly remember Eduardo Slatopolsky, Morton H. Maxwell, Charles R. Kleeman, Saul Massry, Solomon Papper, Jack W. Coburn, Robert Narins, and others.

I have a nice anecdote to share. With a surname like Klahr, working in St. Louis in the State of Missouri, and having studied his text book in English "Renal and Electrolyte Disorders", which was in the series "Differential Diagnosis" from Arco Publishers, I was convinced that the author 'was' an American professor. I purposely took the copy I used so much with me to Seville, because I really wanted him to sign it. So, when he was pointed out to me, I approached him and asked him (in the best English I could) if he would sign it for me. Imagine my surprise when he answered me in Spanish with his unique unaffected grace, "¡Pues claro que sí, cómo no, mi amigo, con gran placer!" ("Well, of course, without a doubt my friend, with pleasure!"). Right there in the corridor he wrote me an affectionate message in his book and he also let me know that he was from Colombia. Then he stepped onto the platform and with his calm, kind voice which he was known for he asked for "his first slide".

Four years later, in 1984, he edited his book "The Kidney and Body Fluids in Health and Disease", which is still of huge value to nephrology residents today, and in 1995 he collaborated with



Dr. Saulo Klahr, 1935-2010.

R. Jacobson and Gary E. Striker on his recognised work *The Principles and Practice of Nephrology*. Since then we met at different conferences and events on our growing specialism, our friendship developed and in April 1993 when we organised our Andalusian Nephrology Society Meeting in Cádiz, he was kind enough to accept our invitation to participate.

At that time, Saulo was principal researcher of the already classic Study "Modification of Diet in Renal Disease (MDRD)" in which attempts were being made at evaluating the impact of a low protein intake diet on the possibility of slowing the progression of renal failure. The work had started almost 2 years earlier and was in its final stages. We suggested that his main conference be based on these results. Of course he accepted without thinking twice. However, when he was about to begin his presentation he explained that because of the contract with *The New England Journal of Medicine*, he could not show any images of his results before they were published. So, without turning a hair, he went on to give a detailed explanation of all of his results, for around 45 minutes. Without showing a single slide!

Professor Saulo Klahr received various prizes throughout his life and held positions of great responsibility. He was the 20th President of the American Society of Nephrology in 1985 and President of the National Kidney Foundation in 1988, taking the role of Editor-in-Chief of publications such as *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*, *The American Journal of Kidney Diseases* and *Kidney International*. In 1998 he received the John P. Peters prize from the American Society of Nephrology and in 2002 he was given the National Torchbearer Award from the American Kidney Foundation and the Edward N. Gibbs Award from the New York Academy of Medicine.

In recent years we even had the opportunity to hear this gifted man speak at one of the great meetings named "Kidney and Hypertension" organised firstly by Fernando Valderrábano, and then by José Luño. On the last occasion, I noticed some subtle changes in him which gave us a sense of foreboding that the onset of Alzheimers had taken hold of this brilliant maestro. I want to end with the words of his soul mate Eduardo Slatopolsky: «*Saulo, I miss you! Until we meet again...*»