



WE INTERVIEW...

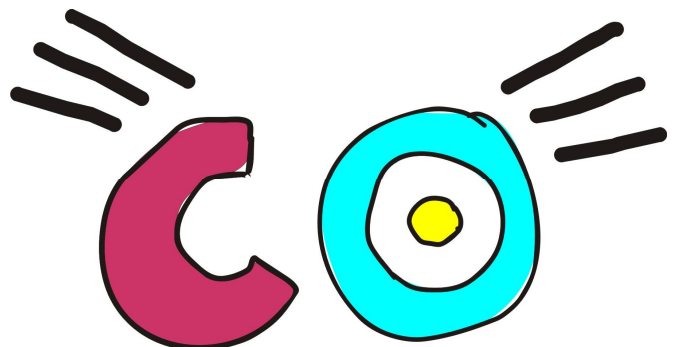
ALBERTO BOUZAS

- cardiologist -

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Alberto Bouzas

We interview

Dr. Alberto Bouzas Mosquera was born 33 years ago in Ordes, A Coruña, the place where he has lived all his life. He studied Medicine in Santiago de Compostela and he has worked as a cardiologist for eight years at the CHUAC (University Hospital Complex of A Coruña). Last February the prestigious magazine *The Lancet* chose, as the best article of the year, his research on the efficiency of a new test to predict heart attacks and other heart diseases, described by him as simple, innocuous, cheap and safe.

The *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, the real bible for cardiologists, published this work, which was also finalist for the *Young Investigators Award* of the European Conference of Cardiology, and wrote the leading article emphasizing that this research could change the diagnostic test used nowadays to establish if a person with thoracic pain has or doesn't have a heart disease and, therefore, can suffer a heart attack or a serious heart problem.



ALBERTO BOUZAS: cardiologist

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Why did you decide to study medicine and then to go into research?

I have wanted to be a doctor since I was a little boy. It is just a question of vocation. Medicine is a very beautiful job and, if I had to choose again, I would choose the same profession. I do not regret it.



You are very young. How did you manage to become so important?

It was largely a matter of luck. It is not easy to excel at something in medicine because a lot has been investigated already and the steps taken are very small. So, luck had a lot to do with it, but luck must be looked for, too.

Have you ever researched in Galicia? Would you like to research abroad?

No, I haven't researched only in Galicia. I spent six months in London working in a quite important hospital. But I would like to do further research in Galicia. Right now I have no interest in researching abroad.

At what level is the Hospital Complex in A Coruña as an international researching centre?

I think it is at a very high level. Both in Spain and in Europe, the Hospital Complex

in A Coruña is very important. Perhaps it does not match up to the major US hospitals in terms of research, because they are at the top in this area. But, I think we are making progress and we are working in the good direction.

Do you think that there is a leading cardiologic technology in Spain?

There are a lot of leading cardiologic technologies in Spain and in other countries. We have been developing a new technique for 15 years which, at the moment, is not being used in other hospitals, at least in the way we use it. It is the *exercise echocardiography* which allows us to detect the cardiac origin of chest pains. So, now, we are working on this technique.

Could you describe in an easy way, without technical expressions, what the awarded research is about?

We studied 4,000 patients with chest pain. The most common test used is a cardiac stress test which consists of a patient walking on a treadmill and registering if he/she has chest pain or changes in his/her heart's electrical activity. We researched 4,000 patients with chest pain. They underwent a stress test (ergometry) and then an ultrasound scan of their hearts which allowed us to assess how their hearts contract during the exercise. Those patients



didn't develop chest pain or changes in the electrocardiogram, in the heart's electrical activity. If they had only undergone the stress test, as usual, they would have been considered normal. However, we observed that 16 per cent of these patients had abnormal contraction of their hearts during the exercise and, therefore, they had a worse prognosis. That means they had more events during their monitoring, more heart attacks and more death.

What did the award mean to you?

Obviously, it was a great honour and pride for us that our research had attracted the attention of a magazine as prestigious as *The Lancet*, which is among the top three in terms of medicine, not only in terms of cardiology.

How do you feel about being finalist for the Young Investigator Award in the European Cardiology Conference with the same research work?

That was the first surprise. It was a great satisfaction to see how highly our work was valued at the conference. Besides, being able to present our work at this congress and have it chosen as finalist for this prestigious award was really gratifying.

Do you think that your work has been given widespread coverage? In which magazines would you like to have your work published?

We have published, not only me but all of my team, different research works about *exercise echocardiography*, as I said before,



in very important cardiologic magazines. Our idea is to continue in this direction and do further research, because there are many things to discover and improve.

What are you working on now?

Well, we are following the research line I explained before. Right now, we are comparing the technique in which the patient has to walk on a treadmill with the traditional one using a bicycle. Then we want to prove if our technique is more or less effective for the diagnosis and assessment of patients with chest pain.

Have you ever had to give bad news to any patients or their relatives?

Yes, more times than I would have liked to. It is very unpleasant, but it is part of our job.

How do you live that situation?

It is a situation in which we empathize with the family and you have to try and get used to it. However, it is very difficult. You never get used to it.





Does the current crisis have any effects on the research field?

Yes, a lot. Up to a couple of years ago there were important grants that had to be suspended. It is really a pity because it's a motivation to do something which we are not paid for. We, doctors, are not paid for our research work. Right now, it is something we do in our free time and there is no guarantee that it will be paid for.

Will doctors be able to change our heart for a technological device in a near future?

Yes, but not in a near future, because it is already possible nowadays. Some people, though it is not common, are walking down the street with an artificial heart which is not theirs. It is something possible.

Do you think that cloning will allow us to change a damaged organ for a healthy one?

Yes, but we still have years of research ahead before getting to that point. But I

have no doubt that it will.

Is there a genetic predisposition to heart disease?

Yes. There is a clear genetic predisposition to most of the heart diseases. Some patients have a clear Mendelian inheritance. It is inherited directly from parents. In some other cases there is predisposition, but it's not Mendelian. In the majority of diseases, especially in cardiovascular diseases, there is a clear predisposition. So, patients with first-degree relatives with a story of heart attacks, have many more possibilities of suffering one.

What advice can you give us to look after our heart?

There are various ways we can look after our heart. First, we have to follow a healthy balanced diet, low in cholesterol, low in animal fats, rich in fruit and vegetables... it is important to walk everyday... do regular exercise, 30 minutes a day are recommended, if possible... and people who have cardiovascular risk factors, such as hypertension, high cholesterol and diabetes, must take care of themselves. And, of course, the most important measure for smokers is to give up smoking.

Our school is taking part in a Comenius project together with Poland and Lithuania. What do you think about this kind of international cooperative work?

I think it is a fantastic initiative, as I was telling your teachers before the interview. I think it is an incredible project. I wish there



were initiatives like this when I was studying!

Do you have any colleagues from Poland or Lithuania?

No, I don't know anybody from Poland or Lithuania.

Have you ever had any contact with these two countries?

No, I have never been to these countries.

Do you have any relatives who live abroad?

I don't think I have any. My parents lived in London for 8 years. As a matter of fact, I was born near London, but they came back to Galicia when I was very young. So, now, I don't have any relatives who live abroad.

Have you travelled to many countries? Did you enjoy their cultures? And their food?

Yes, I have travelled a lot because of my job. If you want to be at the top in medical knowledge, you have to go to other countries, to know other ways of thinking and working and to meet other people who



are involved in similar things. And, yes, I love learning about other cultures. I have been to Germany, Sweden, England, USA... countries with different cultures, but all of

them have many positive things.

When you were a secondary student, which foreign languages did you study? Were you a good student?



I studied English as first foreign language, but I also studied French for two years in high school. I don't know now, but then it was an optional subject. And, although I shouldn't say it, I was a good student.

Are foreign languages needed to carry out your work?

Yes, nowadays in the field of medicine only English is spoken. It is the universal language and today a doctor cannot publish a fairly good article in any other language other than English.

What does Alberto Bouzas think of himself?

It is a difficult question. I am a very shy person, friendly, a friend of my friends, and...I think... I am not a bad person.

Have you ever seen any TV series based on the world of medicine? 'House', 'Central Hospital'...?

Yes, I like *E.R. (Emergency Room)*, which was on some years ago, but now it's not on. And I am a fan of *House*.

How much is true? What are the differences with real life?

E.R. was quite realistic. *House* isn't, but I like it anyway.

Do you like sport? Is sport good for our heart? Do you practice any?

Yes, it is certainly good for the heart. I love playing tennis and going for a bike ride when I have free time and that is not very often.

If you could make a wish knowing that it would come true, what would you like to discover?

I don't know... There are a lot of things we still haven't discovered in medicine, in cardiology... for example, I would like to find the cure for different diseases, particularly for cancer.

Let us ask you the last question, as inexperienced interviewers, is there a question you would like to answer but nobody has asked you?

Right now, I cannot think of any question. Maybe, I would like to be asked if spending so much time on research work, an activity you are not paid for, is really worth it. The real reward is your own personal satisfaction. It is the icing on the cake.

