



Society of
Spanish Researchers
in the United Kingdom

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Health is like a car where science is the motor and education is the gasoline

On Saturday 20th of July, at Guy's Hospital at King's College in London, the society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK/CERU) celebrated its 3rd Seminar of 2013. This event counted with the sponsorship of the Office for Cultural and Scientific Affairs of the Embassy of Spain in the United Kingdom and Banco Santander. As the 3rd seminar coincided with the first anniversary of the Society's constituency, SRUK invited had a guest of honor: Dr Valentín Fuster.

The cardiologist Dr Valentín Fuster – an eminence in the research of cardiovascular disease - currently combines his position as Director of the Cardiovascular Institute and Physician-in-Chief at the Mount Sinai Medical Centre in New York (USA) and his position as the Director at Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Cardiovasculares Carlos III (CNIC) in Madrid (Spain). In 1996 he was awarded with the Príncipe de Asturias Award for Scientific and Technology Research. For the 3rd seminar at SRUK Dr Fuster gave a talk titled “The circle of leadership”.

A year ago 30 funding members constituted SRUK as a non-profit organization to serve as a social network between researchers, promote collaborations between Spanish and British institutions and increase social awareness in research and development. Today SRUK has more than 450 members and is expanding with local constituencies in the UK. There is high tradition of Spanish researchers in British institutions. Dr Valentín Fuster knows this well, as in the past he was one of them.

Valentín Fuster studied medicine at Universidad de Barcelona where his tutor Dr Farreras encouraged him to further understand cardiac disease by studying pathology in England. In Liverpool, his mentor Dr Harold Sheehan showed him a histological preparation of the tissue from a person who had died of a heart attack. The slide showed a clot. “*This slide was the beginning of my career*” explained Dr Fuster. He then pursued the study of the function of platelets to understand the cause of the heart attacks by doing a PhD at the University of Edinburgh. In the 1980s Fuster moved to the USA, where he has remained since, developing one of the most outstanding professional careers in his field.

Last Saturday, during his talk for SRUK, Dr Valentín Fuster explained how the cardiovascular field has gradually shifted from focusing on complex heart disease to its prevention by promoting a healthy lifestyle. “*This is due to economic reasons, as it is easier to prevent illness than to cure it*” explained Dr Fuster. “*In 2030 there will be an estimated 30% of mortality due to cardiovascular disease. We have gained 3 years of increase of life expectancy in the last 3 decades due to technology, but this advance is too expensive. Science has prevented people from dying because of technology, but we cannot just rely on technology, we need to promote health*”.

Dr Fuster explained that health guidelines have a limited influence on the population, to promote health it is important to set an example. *“There are talkers and doers only the people that set an example are long term influencers”* emphasized Dr Fuster *“I believe we have a social responsibility, we should contribute to society”*.

He has led several programs promoting health in Kenia, South America, North America or Spain. These programs have targeted different age groups, from elderly population to the very young. He has even collaborated with Sesame Street where he has inspired a muppet “Dr Ruster” who promotes healthy lifestyle among the monsters in Sesame Street. So far, the response of the young audience has been very positive and the message seems to be sinking in. *“Health is like a car where the motor is science and education is the gasoline, I don’t believe in health advice without the scientific background”* stressed Dr Fuster.

Dr Fuster referred to a diagram to explain what he meant by “circle of leadership”. In every task we encounter different phases where one leads inexorably to the other in a circular manner: passivation – frustration – motivation – satisfaction. *“We never get out of the circle, this is why it is important to persevere and keep on working”*.