

Wherever there is a Cuban doctor, you can meet Fidel

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A young Cuban doctor is today the only specialist in Gastroenterology serving in East Timor. He is part of the Cuban Medical Brigade working in that island, with which we boast excellent ties of collaboration and not only in social services, but also in the training of new health professionals.

Since his arrival on May 26th 2016, Yunier Acosta Hernández has been working at the Guido Valadares National Hospital. He provides outpatient gastroenterology and hepatitis services to help the patients' digestive health and serves in the Primary Health Care as well. He is, indeed, one of the pioneers in the national program for the treatment of Hepatitis B as he is member of the medical staff that introduced it in January 2018. In this regard, treated patients have had a favorable evolution which is pretty good as this is a disease with high prevalence in the population of this Southeast Asian nation.

We talked to him via WhatsApp.

How would you sum up the multiple tasks you perform?

On the caring basis, I perform high-tech videoendoscopy procedures, which favor early diagnosis and treatment of premalignant gastrointestinal diseases as well as emergency therapeutic endoscopy in patients with gastrointestinal bleedings. I am committed to undergraduate education in the subjects of Prevention for second-year students, Clinical Propaedeutics for third-year students and Internal Medicine for students in their third and sixth years. Regarding postgraduate studies, I teach updated courses to Timorese doctors and Cuban collaborators where I address subjects like the treatment of dyspepsia and Hepatitis B in East Timor.

In the research field, I tutor final papers of resident students as well as scientific works of other students from different years, which are submitted to the Students' Scientific Symposia. As a professor, I have also submitted several research works to Professorial Scientific Symposia, being awarded several times. Besides, I have served as a jury member in many scientific events and thus, increasing the research level of speakers.

How did work routines change in the moment Covid-19 pandemic emerged? How have you prepared to face it?

With the emergence of Covid-19 and in the context of reduced attendance to health care facilities, consultations at the hospital and the Primary Health Care did not stop, nor the performance of endoscopy procedures, thereby ensuring the care for the population in strict compliance with the personal protective measures to prevent contagion. And even though the handover of the duty shift was cancelled in every service provided by the hospital, the brigade used its *WhatsApp* group to provide critical indicative guidance as well as to get all the reports associated to the duty shift and the work carried out by collaborators on daily basis.

In this line, we also got a course on the appropriate usage of the protective suit in the direct contact with patients infected. In the education field, we did our best in online classes to resume the academic year.

In your opinion, what's our country's imprint in East Timor?

The work of the Cuban Medical Brigade in East Timor is positively accepted by the population as they appreciate our efforts, our altruistic and humanitarian attitude, which are evident in the accompaniment to the people in East Timor, even in adverse circumstances as the one we are experiencing with Covid-19. Where medical brigades from other countries have decided to withdraw, Cuban health professionals have decided to stay.

Regarding teaching, it must be noted that the Superior School of Medicine is the sole facility fitted for the training of Timorese doctors with 1,018 graduates until 2019 overachieving Fidel's commitment to this country as professionals with high degree of humanism have been spread all over the country, practicing a kind of medicine with a preventive approach, which can be witnessed in the improvement of health indicators in the island, a very positive outcome that gives prestige to the Cuban medical training in the area.

How much has this mission helped you professionally, as a son of the Revolution, and human being?

Professionally, this mission has been great. As a specialist, I have gained lots of experience in the handling of digestive disorders, some of them very frequent in this country. It has improved my skills in high-tech therapy-diagnosis procedures and I have contributed with my knowledge to improve my colleagues'. As a man of the Revolution I have had the opportunity to showcase the virtues of the Cuban Revolution in this nation, with health and education, resulting in the population's wellbeing. I feel complete as a human being by serving mankind, preserving the health of others.

Would you return to East Timor or any other place in the world to save lives?

Since the day I chose to study medicine, I knew I was ready to serve in any place of need in my country or abroad. In fact, as a recent graduate, I worked in the easternmost province of Cuba: Guantánamo and East Timor is my third international mission after Honduras and Venezuela. Of course, I would return to this beautiful island in Asia or any other country where I can save lives and contribute to improve the health indicators of people.

Is there any special anecdote or experience you want to share with us?

Yes, I have one anecdote to share that makes me happy. After one year working at the hospital's Endoscopy department, one of the Timorese nurses who works everyday by my side came close and told me with a smile: "Dr. Yunier, I am pregnant and I would love to name my son like you if he is a boy." Those words meant the world to me. Seven months later, Yunier Godinho Aditya Alves was born. The boy is now two years old and runs happily through the hall of the hospital.

What happen when, by the end of the day, you think about your family, friends, the most important people in your life?

I talk to my family every day. And I regularly do so with my friends. We keep abreast of everything we do in the day. I always convey a sense of calmness, confidence, and serenity in times where Covid-19 is sweeping the world. They know about the importance of my mission in this remote island. They are worried, but they trust me and they know we will meet one day again. By the end of the day, I think about how proud my family is and vice versa, as I lean on them.

If you have to convey a message to the people in Cuba, your family and friends and your colleagues saving lives worldwide, what would you tell them?

As a member of the white coats army, I send to the Cuban people, relatives, friends, and colleagues saving lives in Cuba or abroad, a message of optimism based on the loyalty to our principles of solidarity and altruism, having into account that we represent Cuba and the quality of our service speaks of the education level of our professionals. Wherever there is a Cuban doctor, you can meet Fidel.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
