

In Memoriam

An Apostle of Mexican Public Health

Salvador Zubirán Anchondo
(1898-1998)



Reprinted courtesy of Martha Zubirán

Six months before his hundredth birthday, Dr. Salvador Zubirán Anchondo died of heart failure. Only a few months earlier he had been honored by two institutions: the Ministry of Health, which emphasized his impressive medical career and particularly his work as

founder and director of the National Nutrition Institute, which today bears his name; and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in recognition of his 1946-1948 term as rector. At the latter ceremony, the current rector, Francisco Barnés de Castro, declared 1998 the Year of Zubirán.

Salvador Zubirán was born in a little town in the state of Chihuahua in 1898. By 1923 he had finished his medical studies at the UNAM and was beginning a graduate course at Harvard University, which, 40 years later, in 1963, gave him the Hospital Peter Bent Brigham Medal.

In 1937, he began his career as a civil servant—which he continued all his working life, alternating as a clinician, researcher and teacher—when he was appointed to head up the Department of Children's Social Assistance and the Public Assistance Office. In 1942, in recognition of his work and his important participation in the 1938 brigades to eradicate leprosy under the auspices of President Lázaro Cárdenas, he was named Vice Minister of Public Assistance. In the same period, he promoted and supported concrete activities for the reception and aid to exiles from the Spanish Civil War, for many of whom he found posts in the UNAM.

His work as a civil servant proved essential for the development of public health policies in Mexico. Not only did he found institutions to promote public health, but he also emphasized its human side: the care patients received and, above all, that they be given quality care regardless of their economic status.