

Dr Ignasi de Gispert i Cruz (1903-1984): a man of talent, determination, and learning

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Dr Ignasi de Gispert i Cruz (1903-1984) was one of the first neurologists in Catalonia and was known for his contributions to science and the humanities.

Development. His main work was the *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas* (Treatise on nervous diseases), published in collaboration with Lluís Barraquer Ferré and Emilio Castañer Vendrell. The work comprises two volumes, the first published in 1936 and the second in 1940. Dr de Gispert worked at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau in Barcelona for more than 20 years; he left in 1945 to become head of the neurology department at Clínica Médica B at Hospital Clínic (under Professor Soriano), eventually retiring in 1970. Dr de Gispert also wrote several articles of interest for the general population: he was well-versed in mediaeval and contemporary Catalan history and a lover of poetry, with Frédéric Mistral being one his poets of reference.

Conclusions. Dr Ignasi de Gispert i Cruz represented the human and Christian aspect of medicine and was one of the pioneering neurologists, with outstanding training, enthusiasm and passion for neurology, talent, and scholarly dedication. He died in 1984 at the age of 81.

KEYWORDS

Catalan neurology, de Gispert, history, Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, neurology

Introduction

Dr Ignasi de Gispert i Cruz was born in Girona in 1903. He studied in Barcelona, where he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in 1925 (Figure 1).

Dr Roca Munner played an important role in his training and introduced him to Dr Barraquer Roviralta, the founder of Catalan and Spanish clinical neurology. Barraquer worked at the old Hospital de la Santa Creu, where he established the country's first neurology department,¹ known as the "neurology and electrotherapy dispensary." There, de Gispert observed Barraquer's unstoppable scientific and professional zeal, as well as his humility, modesty, and kindness to his

colleagues.^{2,3} In 1926, Dr de Gispert joined Barraquer's department, where he met Dr Barraquer Ferré and Dr Eduard Tolosa, who was working in clinical neurology at the time.

Dr Barraquer Roviralta died in 1928, when the old Hospital de la Santa Creu was moving to the new Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau.^{4,5} The move to the new hospital was completed in 1929; while it initially seemed that Dr Roca would be appointed director, the religious authorities finally granted the position to Dr Barraquer Ferré; for this reason, Dr Roca resigned and young Dr de Gispert, with his unwavering personality and loyalty, considered leaving his position at the new neurology department; Dr Roca forbade this, and Dr



Figure 1. Dr Ignasi de Gispert

de Gispert continued working at the department for a further 25 years.

Once at the new hospital, he started undertaking scientific research, which led to the presentation of his doctoral thesis in October 1933 and a pioneering lecture in June 1934 on spinal tumours, with the collaboration of Dr Corachan, the brothers Trias i Pujol, Dr Ley, and Dr Tolosa.

Dr de Gispert authored a substantial part of the *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas* (Treatise on nervous diseases) (Figure 2). While he was correcting the last galley proofs, a conflict of interests arose with the editors of the monograph. This was resolved satisfactorily thanks to his perseverance and strong personality: the editors wanted Dr de Gispert to be mentioned as a collaborator rather than as a full author; eventually, de Gispert, together with Dr Barraquer and Dr Castañer, were named as

authors. The first volume, published in 1934, achieved great editorial and scientific success.⁶ This work included part of Dr Barraquer Roviralta's extensive image archive, which included old images of neurological signs and an immense literary and photographic archive, amounting to two thousand pieces.³⁻⁵

Dr de Gispert lived through one of the most turbulent times of the Spanish history. As an adolescent, he lived under the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the Second Spanish Republic, and later witnessed the Spanish Civil War and the postwar years; in the latter years of his life, he would see the country's transition to democracy. His strong and brilliant personality made a mark on every situation he experienced.

Development

Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

Throughout the Spanish Civil War, Dr de Gispert was actively committed to his work, visiting neurological patients at the Hospital de Sant Pau, known at the time as the Hospital General. Encouraged by the success of the first volume, he tirelessly continued writing the second volume of the *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas*. During that time, he coincided with the brilliant neurosurgeon Dr Corachan, who was performing spinal and brain tumour procedures. The young neurosurgeon died prematurely on the Bilbao front.

Admired by the intellectuals of the battalion, Dr de Gispert received the galley proofs of the second volume of the neurology treatise, which he regularly sent to the publishers Salvat. During that time, Dr de Gispert also trained as radiologist.

Postwar years

After the war, Dr de Gispert returned to the Hospital de Sant Pau. The food shortage of the period gave rise to the first cases of lathyrism, caused by a diet almost exclusively composed of the pulse *Lathyrus sativus*; patients from the nearby regions of Esparreguera, Olesa de Montserrat, and Igualada presented spastic paresis, predominantly affecting the thighs. Ley and Oliveras discovered that the disease was caused by consumption of *L. sativus*, which was cheap to cultivate.⁷

Dr de Gispert, who always pursued the human and Christian side of medicine, criticised the incipient socialisation of medicine.

He was also the neurologist of the Catalan sportsmen's health fund, which led him to publish an article on dementia pugilistica. He also contributed to the creation of a law authorising physicians to stop a boxing match if there was danger to the boxer.

Dr de Gispert suffered an episode of benign pleural effusion, which was ultimately found not to be tuberculous; he dedicated his convalescence to the publication of a study on brain aneurysms.

In 1940, the second volume of the *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas* was published, and a bibliographical recension was also published in the prestigious American journal *Archives of Neurology*. We should mention that the neurological treatise had for many years been a work of reference in Hispanic America. The named authors, in order, were: Lluís Barraquer Ferré, Ignasi de Gispert i Cruz, and Emilio Castañer Vendrell. The work comprised two volumes, the first (published in 1936) with 1154 pages and the second (published in 1940) with 1108 pages.⁸

Dr de Gispert wrote other three monographs: *Encefalitis y encefalomyelitis agudas* (Encephalitis and acute encephalomyelitis) (Figure 3), *Paraplejías espasmódicas* (Spastic paresis) (1942), and *Hemorragias meníngeas* (Meningeal haemorrhages).

Following a study on syringomyelia, published in collaboration with Barraquer Ferré, he paid special attention to the condition and its differential diagnosis with leprosy, myelitis, and spinal cord compression. He also studied cauda equina and brainstem tumours.⁹⁻¹¹

Dr de Gispert's scientific activity was very intense. He collaborated with Barraquer Ferré, Tolosa, Pi i Figueras, Busch, Corachan, Balcells Gorina, Segarra, and Girona, among others. By 1950, at the height of his "graphorrhea" (as Dr de Gispert himself ironically called it), he had published more than one hundred articles and the above mentioned monographs; he also taught courses on neurology and participated in conferences.¹²

During this period, he combined his clinical work at the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau with directing the neurology dispensary at Hospital Infantil de Sant Joan de Déu in Barcelona, located on Avenida Diagonal at the time.

The year 1945 was important for Dr de Gispert as he attended the International Congress of Neurology in Paris, where he came to meet world-renowned

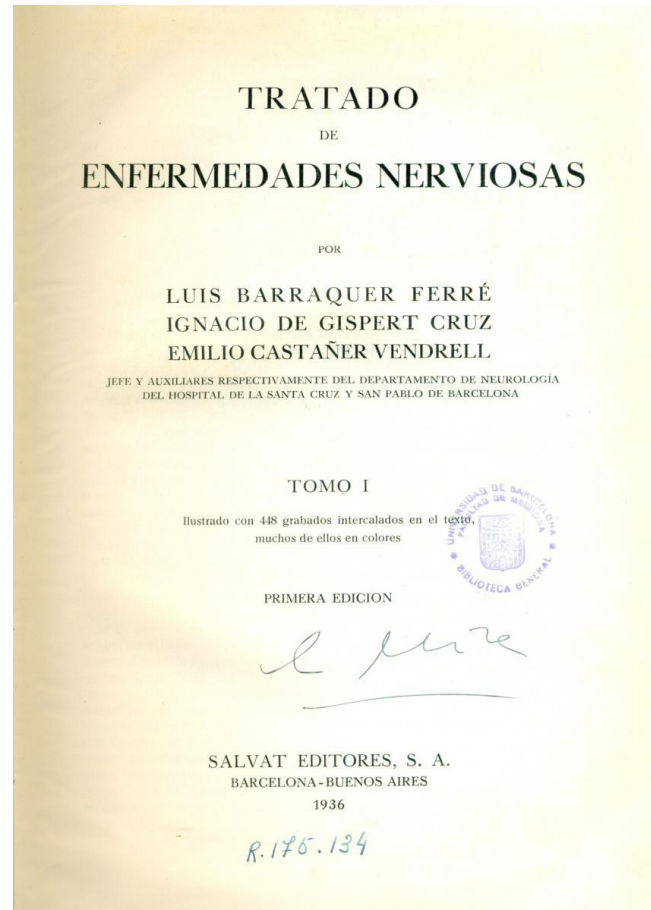


Figure 2. *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas* (Treatise on nervous diseases), published in collaboration with Lluís Barraquer Ferré and Emilio Castañer Vendrell.

neurological figures whom he had always admired, including the great neurosurgeon Dr Olivecrona, as well as Dr Penfield, Dr Alajouanine, Dr Brain, Dr Barré, and Dr Wartenberg. We should mention that Pierre Marie, a student of Charcot's, wrote the prologue to the neurology treatise.¹³

Clinical and professional maturity

Dr de Gispert maintained links with the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau for 20 years (from 1926 to 1945), holding a position of "first assistant" at the neurology department.

In 1945, Professor Ferrer Solervicens asked him to collaborate as assistant neurologist in his chair at the

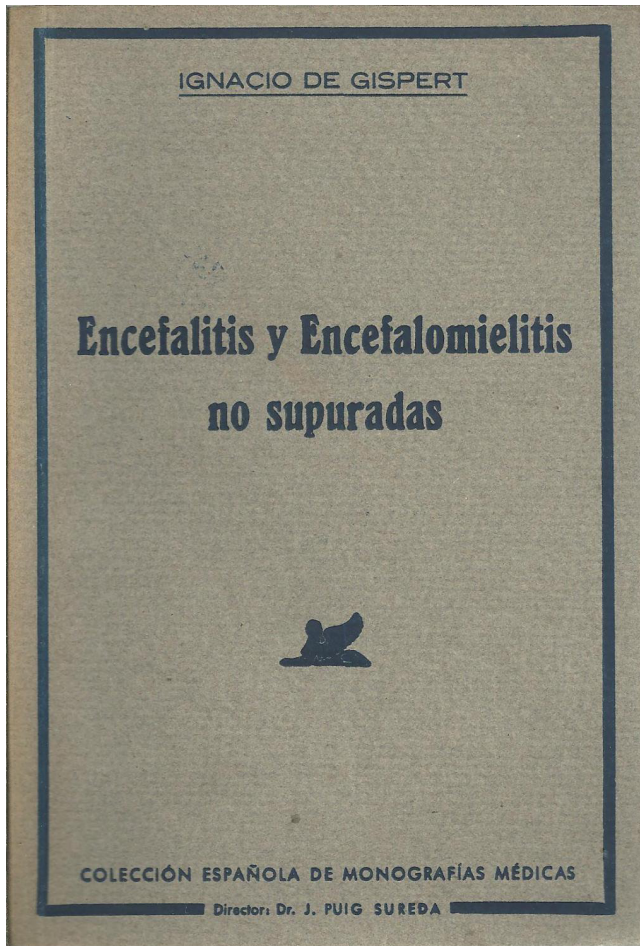


Figura 3. *Encefalitis y encefalomiелitis no supuradas* (Non-suppurating encephalitis and encephalomyelitis), published by Dr de Gispert.

Hospital Clínic Faculty of Medicine; Dr de Gispert agreed, and started working as head of neurology at the Clínica Médica B (under Professor Soriano) until his retirement in 1970.

It should be noted that other collaborators with training in neurology also worked in the department; these included Dr Girona and Dr Segarra Obiol, who built a brilliant professional career in Boston. Additional collaborators were Dr Pons Beltrán, Dr Bové, Dr Torelló, Dr Vives Morros, and Dr Roger Lechuga. Dr Jordi Pujol i Soley, who later became president of the Generalitat de Catalunya, also worked there for a time. Dr Isidro Sancho Villa was the student who worked longest with Dr de Gispert, and succeeded him as head of department in 1970 when he retired.¹²

In 1962, Dr de Gispert was named president of the neurology section of the Acadèmia de Ciències Mèdiques de Catalunya i Balears. That year, for the first time since the Civil War, Occitan colleagues from the southern French cities of Montpellier, Perpignan, Narbonne, and Toulouse, were welcomed in Catalan (they were addressed as “freires occitans”, the expression used by Mistral) thanks to Dr de Gispert’s efforts.¹²⁻¹⁵

A humanist and learned neurologist

Dr de Gispert’s cultural knowledge was broad and robust. In parallel to the medical articles he published, he also wrote articles of interest for the general population for newspapers such as *La Publicidad*.

As a young man, he had participated in the typical gatherings of the time with the poet Garcés, the journalist Carles Santís, the council member Carrasco i Formiguera, the communist politician Dr Perramón, and the illustrator Bofarull, among other personalities.

He was knowledgeable on the subject of mediaeval and contemporary Catalan history and was a lover of poetry, with Frédéric Mistral being one his favourite poets. He also published several monographs: *Vida, pasión y muerte de un médico de barriada* (Life, passion, and death of a neighbourhood doctor), *Els neuròlegs i la música* (Neurologists and music), and *Memòries d’un neuròleg que fou metge de batalló* (Memoir of a neurologist as a battalion doctor); the latter recounted his memories of the Spanish Civil War, and is of pronounced autobiographical interest.¹⁶

Dr de Gispert’s innate enthusiasm was striking; an excellent clinician, he always tried to detect the most relevant or surprising symptoms when examining patients. He could usually suggest a probable diagnosis immediately. This diagnostic accuracy was the result of his extensive experience and great scholarship. However, his detractors attacked him because he did not follow the academic recommendations regarding history taking and examination; his approach was less systematic or exhaustive. Dr de Gispert was highly talented and had a great ability to write and publish case reports of the patients he attended, treated, and diagnosed.

With an unbreakable will and rebellious nature, he resembled an English gentleman, polite but determined; during Saturday morning sessions at Hospital Clínic in Barcelona, he usually carried an issue of *Destino*,

his favourite weekly magazine that he would read on weekends.

Dr de Gispert died in Barcelona in 1984, at the age of 81.

Conclusions

Dr de Gispert was the lead author of *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas*, with the collaboration of Dr Barraquer Ferré and Dr Castañer. He worked at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau in Barcelona for 20 years and at Hospital Clínic for 25. Together with an extensive neurological bibliography, he also wrote articles of cultural and general interest. A pioneering neurologist in Spain, Dr de Gispert was known for his strong personality, huge talent, and for his great culture and erudition.

Conflicts of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank María José Sánchez, the librarian at Hospital Universitari del Sagrat Cor, Barcelona, for her invaluable assistance in locating and acquiring the rare documents that were necessary for this study.

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