Carabanchel Hospital for Epileptics, 1899

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. In the latter half of the 19th century, asylums, colonies, and dedicated hospitals were built for the care of patients with epilepsy. In Spain, an asylum-institution was built for this purpose in 1899 in the rural setting of Carabanchel, not far from Madrid. Until now, limited data have been available on the medical care provided there.

Methods. José Álvarez Sierra's 1952 book on the hospitals of Madrid and the book published in 2000 by the Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God to commemorate the centenary of the centre's foundation are fundamental references. Data on historical figures and events and the development of the hospital over time were obtained from secondary sources.

Results. The Marquess of Vallejo financed the creation of the institute-asylum for epileptics in memory of his son, a lawyer, who had epilepsy. He died unexpectedly at the age of 24 years during night-time sleep following a generalised seizure, an early observation of sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. Even before the hospital was completed, its facilities were made available to convalescent soldiers sent home from Cuba. The Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God attended to patients' basic needs, providing instruction and occupational therapy. Based on their careers, the physicians responsible for medical care had little interest in epilepsy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Dr Díez Cuervo and a group of collaborators endeavoured to transform the old hospital into a reference centre for epilepsy.

Discussion. Unlike other European asylums and colonies for epileptic patients, which evolved into modern centres, today's Instituto de San José-Hermanos de San Juan de Dios Foundation is dedicated to rehabilitation and palliative care. The Marquess' original intention, for the centre to be dedicated to patients with epilepsy, was not respected, and these patients are the losers in this story.

KEYWORDS

Carabanchel Hospital for Epileptics, Cuban War of Independence, Díez Cuervo, Instituto de San José-Hermanos de San Juan de Dios Foundation, Marquess of Vallejo, SUDEP

Introduction

Advised by Julián Calleja y Sánchez, chair of anatomy of the Colegio de Médicos de San Carlos and chancellor of Universidad Central, and with the support of brother Benito Menni Fogini (today, Saint Benedict Menni), the Marquess of Vallejo acquired an estate known as "Las Piqueñas" in Carabanchel, then a small town near Madrid, in 1895. His intention was to establish a centre for patients with epilepsy in memory of his son, who died during an epileptic seizure. Brother Benito, born in Milan, was not unfamiliar with hospital foundations: since arriving in Barcelona in 1867, he had helped organise as many as 14 of these institutions in Spain.[1]

The Hospital for Epileptics in Carabanchel, now a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Madrid, is largely unknown among physicians. Dr Álvarez-Sierra[2] dedicated a short chapter to it in his book *Los hospitales*

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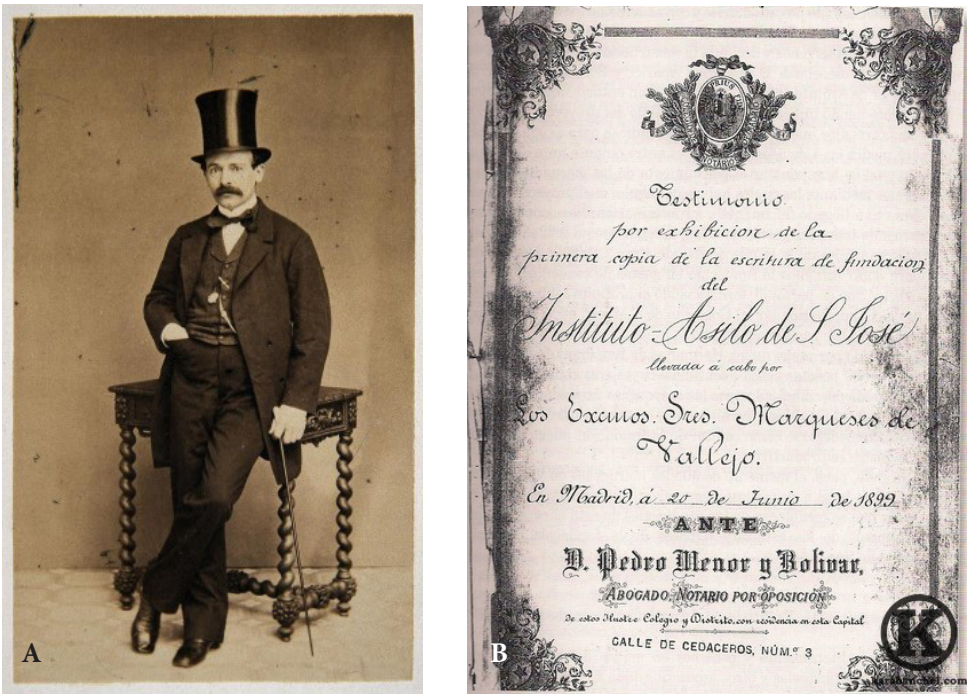

Figure 1. A) The Marquess of Vallejo, a young millionaire who had been fortunate in life (Source: Archivo Jerónimo Jiménez y Eusebio Juliá. Biblioteca Digital Memoria de Madrid). B) The notarial deed marking the completion of his most precious endeavour, the Instituto-Asilo de San José, signed on 20 June 1899 (Source: Karabanchel.com).

de Madrid de ayer y de hoy ("The hospitals of Madrid yesterday and today"). José Álvarez-Sierra (Madrid, 1888-Madrid, 1980) was a prolific writer (his articles and monographs on figures from Spanish medicine are priceless), and frequently attended gatherings of the city's intellectual circles. To my knowledge, the chapter is the only document to address healthcare at this unique hospital.

The present study addresses the circumstances that led to the construction of the complex, with its impressive pavilions, dedicated specifically to the care of patients with epilepsy, and discusses the individuals who made it possible, its role in the understanding of epilepsy, and the development of the institute over time. Finally, the centre is compared against other European asylums, colonies, and hospitals prioritising the care of epileptic patients in the 19th century.

Methods

The biography of the Marquess of Vallejo, the benefactor who funded the construction of the hospital, was consulted in the Spanish Biographical Dictionary, published by the Spanish Royal Academy of History, and in the archive of the Spanish Senate, which contains information on his political career and personal fortune. The care given to convalescent soldiers after the Cuban War of Independence was consulted in the Saturday 10 September 1898 edition of the *Diario Oficial del Ministerio de Guerra* (Official Journal of the Ministry of War; Vol. III, p.1194). Interesting images and data are contributed in articles published in *Nuevo Mundo* (12 October 1898, p.6-7) and on the blog *Enfermería* (5 June 2018). The image archive of the Spanish Royal National Academy of Medicine and the excellent collection of the Instituto San José Foundation (https://www.ohsjd.es) are also noteworthy. A luxuriously published 349-page volume focuses on the Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God and the 100 years they dedicated to the Instituto-Asilo de San José in Carabanchel Alto,[1] but the discussion of the medical care provided is limited. An article published in the magazine *Madrid Histórico* is fundamentally based on this important work.[3]

Figure 2. A) José Manuel Fernández Vallejo Flaquer, the young lawyer who died in his sleep. B) An image of his father, now older, shows a troubled man, touched repeatedly by tragedy.

Results

The Marquess of Vallejo and his epileptic son

The Marquess of Vallejo, Don Diego Fernández de Vallejo Segura y Baños (Soto de Cameros, La Rioja, 4 March 1824-Madrid, 31 December 1901), was one of the richest and most influential men in Spain. He moved to Madrid in his youth, under the protection of his uncle Pedro González Vallejo, Archbishop of Toledo. He took advantage of the Confiscation of Mendizábal to acquire numerous estates and buildings previously belonging to the church. A close friend of Sagasta, he was a successful stock trader, entrepreneur, and banker. Queen Isabella II appointed him a senator for life in acknowledgement of his determined support for the monarchy.

Careful examination of the few surviving photographs says much about his personality. A fortunate man since his youth, he perhaps adopted the pose best reflecting his significant wealth: an impressively tall top hat, a pocketwatch on a chain, probably made of gold, an elegant walking cane, and an affected cross of the legs (Figure 1A). He never forgot his roots in La Rioja, bequeathing 100 000 pesetas to the poor people of Logroño; the city named a street after him, where the local seminary once stood[a]. In Madrid, at half-past two in the afternoon on 31 December 1901, he died of pneumonia[b]. The most exciting moment of his life surely would have been signing the deed of foundation of the Institute-Asylum, marking the end of four years of construction work (Figure 1B).

José Manuel Fernández Vallejo Flaquer (1854-1878; Figure 2A), the Marquess' oldest son, suffered from epilepsy. His father consulted with Julián Calleja y Sánchez (1836-1913), the influential chancellor of the Colegio de Médicos de San Carlos in Madrid; when the desired improvement was not achieved, and on the advice of Dr Calleja, the family travelled to France in search of a remedy. In his latter years, the Marquess' face

[a] El centro médico para epilépticos que surgió hace 119 años tras la muerte del hijo del marqués de Vallejo. *Diario La Rioja*, 10 February 2019.
[b] Necrológicas. *El Liberal*, 1 January 1902, p.3.

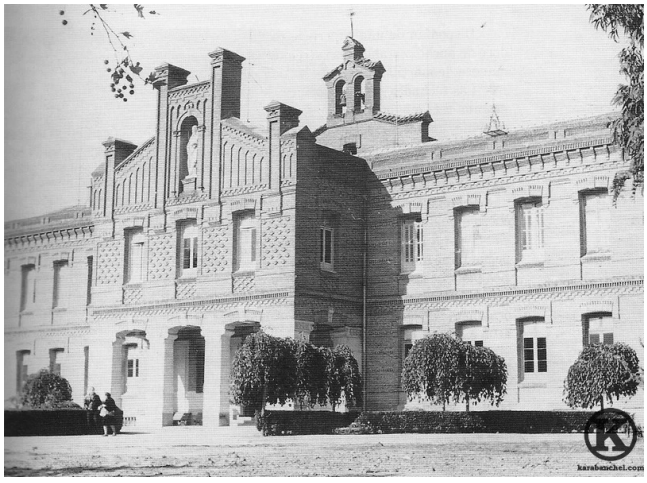

Figure 3. The splendid brick façade of the building, circa 1900 (Source: Karabanchel.com).

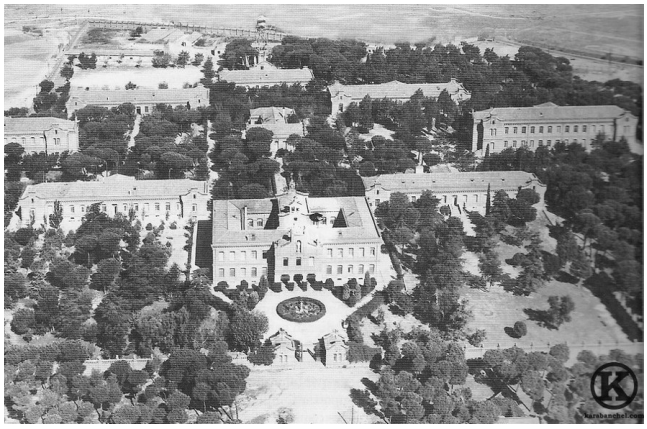

Figure 4. Aerial view of the hospital complex today, surrounded by dense woods. The bare patch of wall to the right of the image is the burial place of the 14 patients who died in the attack on the institute during the Spanish Civil War (Source: Karabanchel.com).

is that of a generous, high-minded man who has known tragedy, with the deaths of his first wife Sofía Flaquer Ferola and his epileptic son (Figure 2B). There is no record of the characteristics of José Manuel's seizures or the physicians and institutions the family visited in France. In any case, having failed to find a treatment, they returned to Madrid and moved into the house at number 4, Calle Fuencarral. It was in this house that José Manuel Vallejo died at the age of 24 years, on 18 April 1876. He is known to have had a normal intellectual level, and completed his degree in law. He died in the night during an epileptic seizure, and was thought to have suffocated on his pillow.[1]

This tragedy spurred the transformation of the Marquess into a generous philanthropist: he founded an orphanage for the children of Civil Guard personnel in Valdemoro (Madrid), as well as the Hospital for Epileptics in Carabanchel, established in memory of his son's death. On 4 October 1994, Vallejo's remains were transferred to the crypt at the hospital from the San Isidro Cementery. A former altar boy from the church at the "Las Piqueñas madhouse," as the locals knew the asylum, described his great fear of the church's crypt, which held the coffins of 12 monks who were executed at "Charco Cabrera," near Boadilla del Monte, on 29 July 1936.[4]

The Institute-Asylum in Carabanchel Alto, 1899

The site had been the summer residence of the Duchess of Santoña and her husband, a rich man from India, in the town of Carabanchel Alto, which had long been a leisure destination for the nobility.[5] Surrounded by woods and vineyards and facing the Guadarrama mountain range, there could be no better setting for accommodating incurable patients. The Hospital for Epileptics had no fewer than nine pavilions, which could accommodate 40 patients each (Figure 3). The Marquess contributed two and a half million pesetas, plus additional funds for maintaining the centre. The foundation stone was blessed on 4 August 1895, and the project was concluded on 20 June 1899, after the admission of Enrique Vázquez Alonso, an epileptic boy of 16 years of age. Admitted patients had to pay 2 pesetas per day to cover costs, such as food and clothing, but a maximum of 150 places were reserved for poor patients. Although the archives of the Instituto-Asilo de San José were destroyed in 1936, data do exist on the numbers of admissions between 1899 and 1918: the mean is slightly below 200 patients per year.

Under the direction of the architect Federico Aparici y Soriano and his assistant Enrique Fort y Guyenet, a magnificent building was constructed in a vaguely Neo-Mudéjar style. The aerial view of today's complex (Figure 4) is striking both for its dimensions and for the extensive gardens that surround the buildings; these were once used as vegetable gardens and vineyards in occupational therapy. Large, sun-filled shared rooms could accommodate several patients at a time; however, the high beds, without protective measures to prevent falls and with headboards made from metal bars, seem not to be the most appropriate design for patients with severe epilepsy (Figure 5A-C). A modestly furnished, high-ceilinged office (Figure 6A) enabled staff to review

Figure 5. A) A shared bedroom, with excessively high beds with no fall prevention measures. B) Dr José Fernández Robina, director of the institute after the death of Julián Calleja. C) Dr Rafael Cutanda Salazar as an old man, after a life dedicated to the institution; the cane indicates that he suffered from progressive palsy of the limbs (Source: Fundación Instituto San José, Madrid).

clinical histories and to interview patients and their relatives. Another image shows a sick-bay with an uncomfortable bed for performing basic treatments, and a cabinet holding medical instruments (Figure 6B). These installations are basic but sufficient, if we consider that the institution was conceived as an asylum.

The biographies of the physicians responsible for the asylum in its early years are relevant. The chair of anatomy of the Universidad Central, Julián Calleja y Sánchez (1836-1913), whom Cajal called "the dictator of San Carlos," was above all an influential politician.[6] The neuropsychiatrist César Juarros' description of him is very telling: "A run-of-the-mill chair, with an unctuous manner, the great tyrant of academic bureaucracy."[7(p11)] Given the Marquess' considerable fortune and Calleja's political ambitions (he was named the Count of Calleja at the end of his career), it seems ludicrous to entrust the care of patients with epilepsy to an anatomist.

After Calleja's death in 1913, Dr José Fernández Robina took charge of the institution. He was assistant professor under the chair of general pathology of Amalio Gimeno, until he retired from the role due to illness.[8] One of the most prestigious lecturers at San Carlos, Amalio Gimeno promoted experimental pharmacology and served as minister of public instruction and fine arts. Fernández Robina had presented his doctoral thesis, "Algunas consideraciones de la talla hipogástrica" (Some notes on suprapubic cystotomy), in 1893. For reasons unknown, he moved to Murcia to practice medicine in 1899, according to the local delegation of the tax office. It should be noted that he received a modest salary of 250 pesetas per month, and was still receiving the same amount seven years later; in comparison, Julián Calleja received 5000 pesetas per year. Dr Rafael Cutanda Salazar (1876-1956), who worked as an assistant to Fernández Robina alongside another physician (Dr Manuel Olías Salvado) on whom no further data are available, is mainly remembered for the 58 years he spent caring for patients at the Institute-Asylum. The physicians were assisted by several monks, some of whose names are recorded: brother Rogelio, brother Camilo Vives, and brother Juan Grande.[9] They took a commendable attitude in protecting women and children during the bitter combat that took place in the area surrounding the institution, sheltering them in the hospital's basement.[1(p45)] Dr Cutanda had trained with

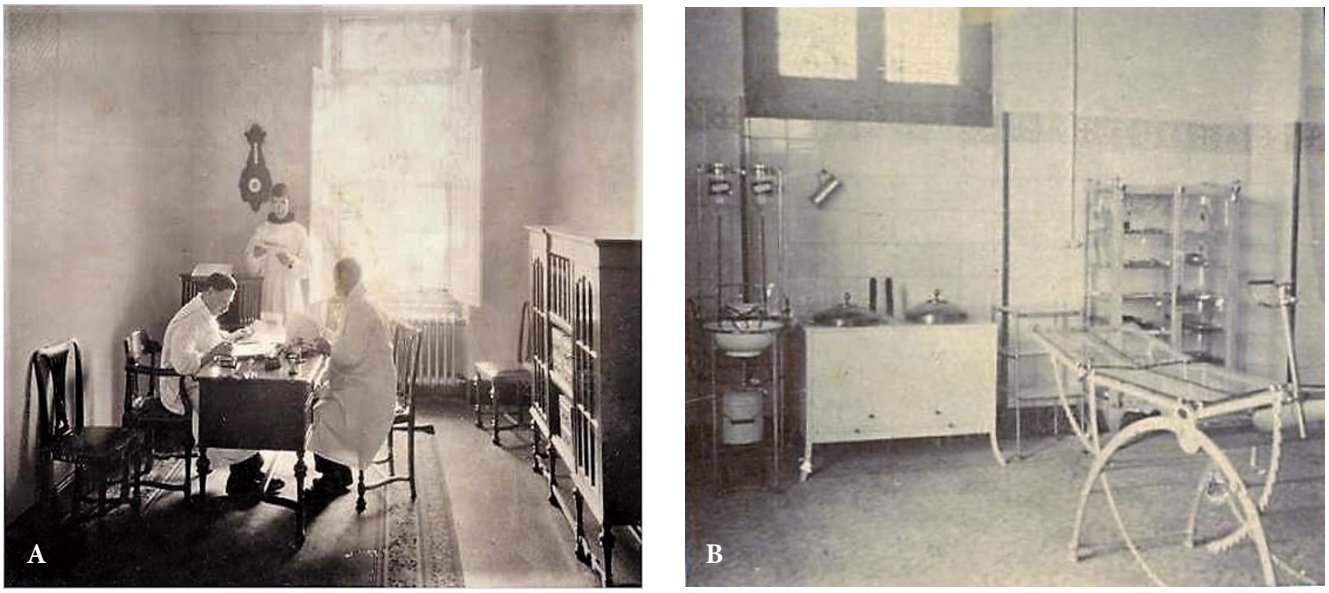

Figure 6. A) The physicians' office, with modest furniture. B) The institute's sick-bay, with a very high, uncomfortable bed and a glass cabinet bearing some medical instruments (Source: Fundación Instituto San José, Madrid).

Juan Madinaveitia in the Hospital Provincial de Madrid, and was a student of Cajal's. He presented his doctoral thesis on the serological diagnosis of exanthematic typhus in 1899.[10] He died after an indefinite process of "progressive paralysis," and was severely disabled but remained lucid to the end.

Repatriation of convalescent soldiers from the Cuban War of Independence

Soon before the inauguration of the Hospital for Epileptics, the Marquess of Vallejo was concerned by the numerous soldiers returning from Cuba in terrible health, who could not be accommodated in the still incomplete Hospital Militar Gómez Ulla (today, Hospital Militar de la Defensa). The construction work was effectively declared to be complete in 1903. Between September 1888 and February 1889, the centre received 375 soldiers from Cuba, and its 24 pavilions were insufficient. The Official Diary of the Ministry of War reported the humanitarian decision of the Marquess of Vallejo to take them in. Therefore, an agreement was made with the Ministry of War that 125 convalescent soldiers would be successively admitted from 12 September to 31 December 1898, with a maximum stay of 50 days per person. Medical care was left to the judgement of the Marquess, under military supervision. Moreover, a specific ward was established for patients with infectious diseases to stay until they could be transferred to the army hospital in Madrid. As a result of these circumstances, it was barely possible to admit epileptic patients during the first phase of the Institute-Asylum.[3]

An image from the time shows the still emaciated soldiers at lunchtime, under the watchful gaze of three monks (Figure 7). The Marquess had ordered that no expense be spared: "substantial soups, succulent chicken, chops, and roasted meat, as well as excellent wine," according to brother Rogelio. In a sunny corridor with high ceilings, the soldiers are shown reading and conversing with their comrades (Figure 8). The Instituto San José Foundation preserves a book showing the names and the provinces of origin of all the soldiers attended; the majority were from towns in central Spain. An annotated postcard from 1929 (Figure 9) shows a relatively large group of

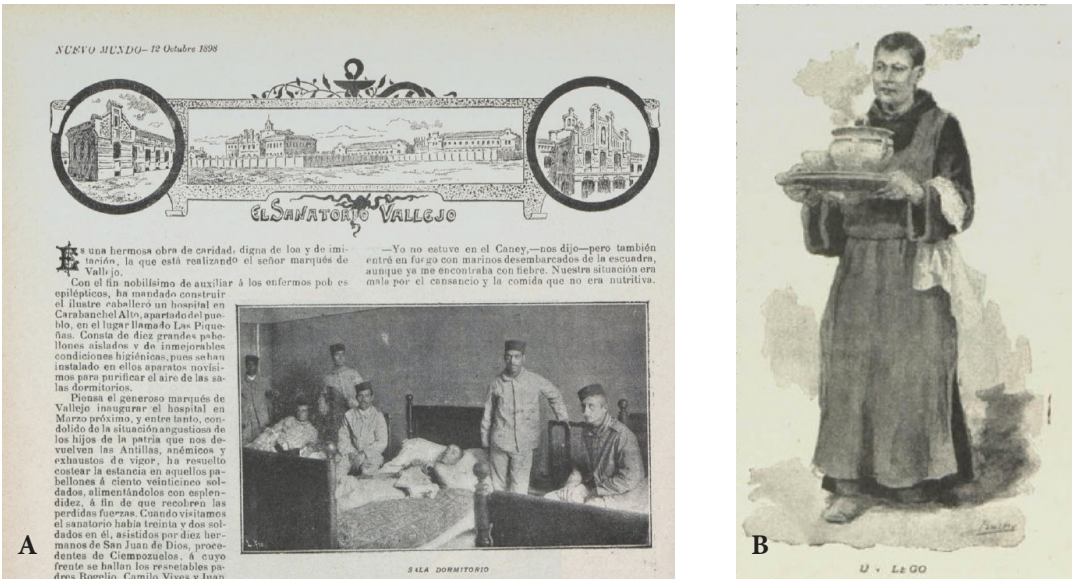

Figure 7. A) Below a curious title illustration in an article in *Nuevo Mundo* magazine on the "Vallejo Sanatorium," a group of convalescent Spanish soldiers are shown enjoying a generous meal, including a bottle of wine. B) The article is also illustrated with a drawing of a monk carrying a large, steaming pot of soup

monks and patients (the majority adults), apparently fraternising.

Development of the Instituto-Asilo de San José

The Spanish Civil War dealt a heavy blow to the hospital and its people. Twelve monks were executed, the centre was seized, and religious services were prohibited. The hospital became a battlefield and was assaulted by a platoon of Moroccan soldiers, leading to the deaths of 14 patients, who were buried near the fence encircling the gardens.[1]

In 1961 the centre's focus shifted towards special education, including occupational therapy in the gardens and a cobbler's workshop to serve the community; 12 specialist physicians were hired in 1963.[3(p177)] A physician from Carabanchel, Jerónimo Ibarra, treated the most common health conditions in the centre's patients. In the 1980s, the Institute-Asylum became a reference centre for the diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy. Without a doubt, this can be attributed to the efforts of José Díez Cuervo (Figure 10), who brought together a group of physicians interested in epilepsy. The group published updates[11] and monographs on psychiatric aspects of the disease[12,13] in collaboration with the Spanish League Against Epilepsy. The hospital must have received a considerable number of patients: a study into the response to clobazam included 52 residents with treatment-resistant epilepsy,[14,15] and Sánchez Caro's[16] doctoral thesis in 1992 selected 20 children aged between 7 and 13 years from a total of 175 patients in this age range, for a neuropsychological study. International relations were not neglected, and an annual Ibero-American Epilepsy Award was established. Above all, Díez Cuervo stood out as a pioneering Spanish expert on autism.[17]

The Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God also prospered. The Order's novitiate, previously located in Ciempozuelos, was moved to the Institute-Asylum, and in 1934 they were left an important documentary legacy from the Casa de Granada. In the 1960s, the institute received missionary Benedictine sisters, who would work in the pedagogical institute for children and adolescents with learning difficulties.[3] Today, the Instituto de San José-Hermanos de San Juan de Dios Foundation specialises in

Figure 8. Soldiers passing the time in a corridor with high ceilings and uncomfortable benches, with some still wearing the *rayadillo* uniform (Source: Karabanchel.com).

neurological and traumatological rehabilitation and is a reference centre for palliative care[c].

Discussion

The inauguration of the impressive architectural ensemble of the Institute-Asylum in the town of Carabanchel Alto in Madrid, founded and financed by the Marquess of Vallejo, presents similarities with the numerous asylums and colonies for epileptic patients created in Europe in the latter half of the 19th century.[18-25] The French aristocrat Count Louis de Larnage had built an asylum for patients with epilepsy in La Teppe; the oldest such centre in Europe, it was later entrusted to the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. For decades, the centre was dedicated only to custody, until in 1955 the neuropsychiatrist Paul Favel started a process of modernisation, with improvements in diagnostic and therapeutic practices.[21] This was precisely the objective of Díez Cuervo and his small group of collaborators in the 1970s and 1980s.

It should be stressed once more that the Instituto-Asilo de San José was founded by a philanthropist, the Marquess of Vallejo, in memory of his epileptic son. Few details of his son José Manuel's disease are available. However, we do know that he presented generalised seizures that could not be controlled by the limited treatment options available at the time,[26] and that he had sufficient intellectual capacity to complete a degree in law. The most dramatic aspect of the story was his unexpected death in the family home at the age of 24 years. He was found dead in his bedroom and was thought to have suffocated on his pillow during a generalised seizure.[1] This story presents the most common traits of so-called sudden unexpected death in epilepsy (SUDEP), which affects 1% of patients with epilepsy.[27,28] Numerous causes

[c] https://fundacioninstitutosanjose.com/

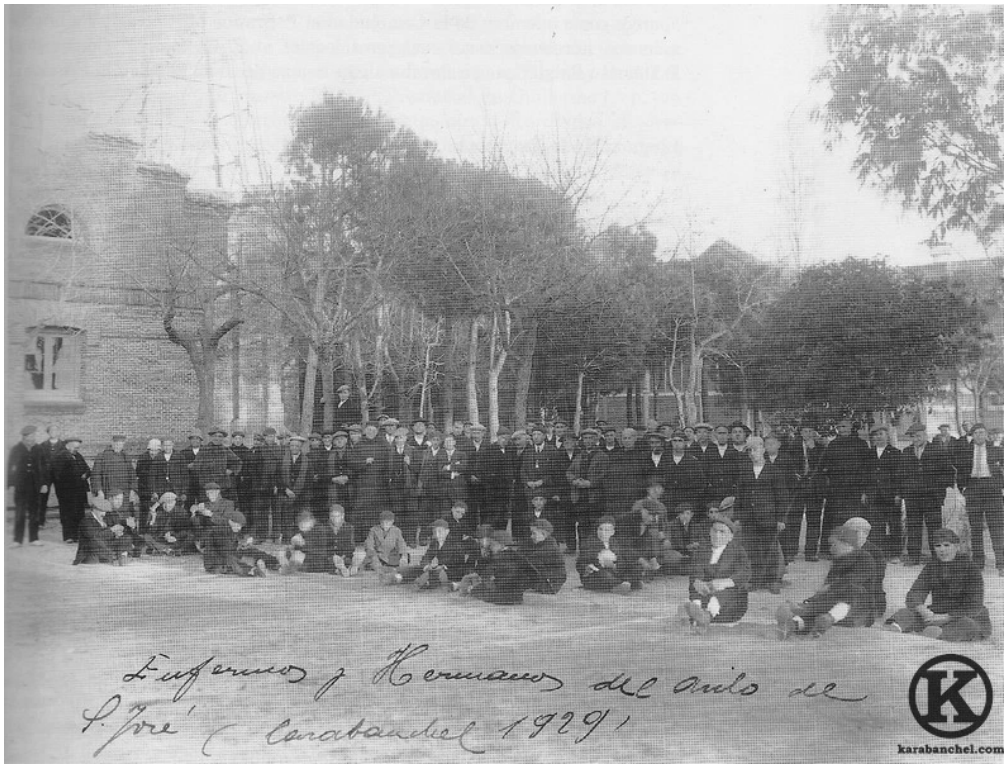

Figure 9. Postcard dated 1929. The annotation reads "patients and monks at the San José Asylum, Carabanchel." The majority of the patients shown are adults (Source: Karabanchel.com).

have been proposed, with the most widely accepted being post-convulsive central apnoea. In patients under monitoring, 22% of generalised seizures are followed by a period of apnoea, regardless of whether onset is focal, generalised, or unknown.[28]

The emergency admission of convalescent soldiers returning from the Cuban War of Independence to the Carabanchel Hospital for Epileptics highlights its fundamental purpose as an asylum. Spain had sent 180 000 soldiers to Cuba between 1868 and 1875; 7% died during the voyage. Facing adverse weather conditions, and with *guajira* slippers and clothing that gave them a "dishevelled appearance," diseases such as yellow fever (which claimed 7304 lives in 1896), dysentery, malaria, and tuberculosis caused more deaths that the Remington rifles and the fearsome machetes of the Mambí soldiers. We can easily understand the generous Marquess' eagerness to provide unlimited hearty food to these soldiers, who were accustomed to unappetising Italian tinned goods, dry biscuits, and boiled rice. In 1897 alone, around 30 000 patients were hospitalised in the only available clinics in Havana, Santiago, Santa Clara, and Puerto Príncipe. Only some survivors had the good fortune to be repatriated to Spain.[29,30]

More realistic decisions also had to be made in the management of patients with incurable epilepsy. At Number 24, Queen Square, in the elegant Bloomsbury area of London, the statue of George III's wife Queen Charlotte witnessed the foundation of the world's first hospital for neurological patients; the king suffered porphyria with psychiatric manifestations. As epilepsy accounted for more than half of admissions, Jabez Spence Ramskill, one of the centre's first physicians, persuaded the Chandler family to include epilepsy among the objectives of the new centre, which was named the National Hospital for the Relief and Cure of the Paralysed and Epileptic (today, the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery).[31,32] Hughlings Jackson

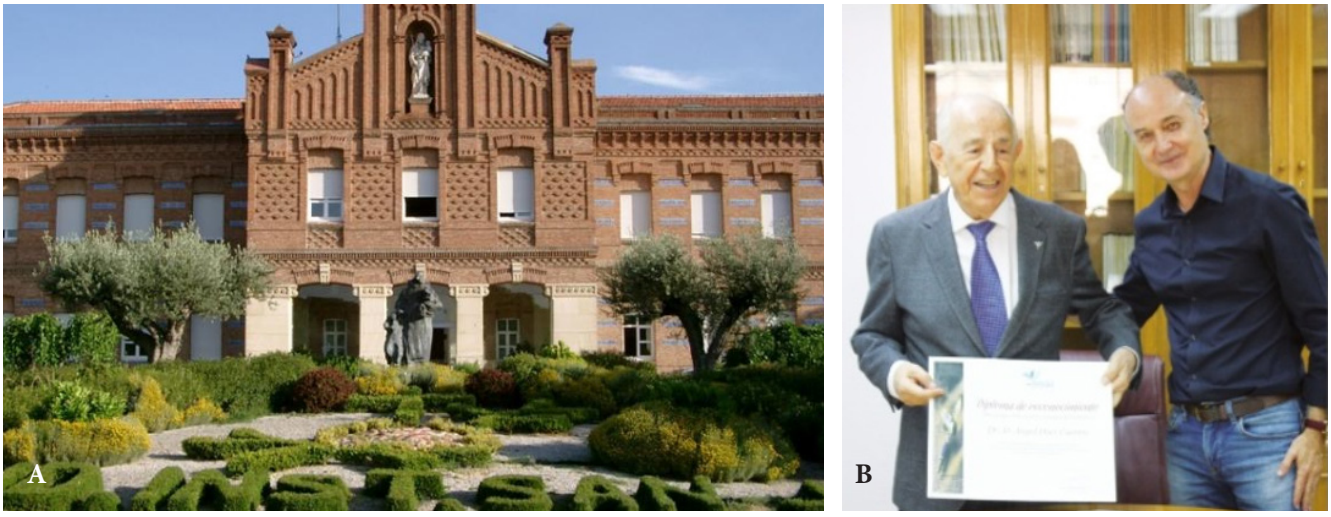

Figure 10. A) Façade of today's Instituto de San José-Hermanos de San Juan de Dios. B) Dr Díez Cuervo receiving an award from the educational psychology section of the Official College of Psychologists of Madrid in 2018 (Source: Fundación Instituto San José, Madrid).

suggested the need for the Chalfont Centre for Epilepsy, which became a reality in 1892. Built in a rural setting on the outskirts of London, people with epilepsy could live and work under the protective mantle of Queen's Square, although the centre had its own services and was organised independently. More than 200 years later, the centre continues to run.[33]

The concepts of motivation and purpose should be separated when we consider the creation of asylums and colonies for epileptic patients. As mentioned above, the Marquess of Vallejo's decision to build the centre was motivated by the desire to commemorate his son José Manuel, who could not be cured in Europe. Many others were motivated by religious conviction; examples are the devout von Berkhout, in the Netherlands,[19] the Filadelfia colony (the name meaning "brotherly love") in Denmark, which was created due to the Christian beliefs of the physician Adolph Sell,[25] and Sandvika in Norway, which was promoted by a congregation of deacons.[20]

Permanently accommodating incurable patients, who often present severe intellectual disability, are unable to work, and constitute an unsupportable burden for their families, went beyond sheltering them, offering little more than a home and food. There were also less charitable aims: the segregation and control of these individuals, who were considered potentially dangerous, if not possessed, degenerate, or mad; these ideas persisted until the 1950s.[33] In Spain, using the term epilepsy, which carried extreme stigma, was considered until recently to show a lack of expertise or tact on the part of physicians. In this light, Álvarez Sierra's final paragraph is meaningful: "If these establishments were to extend appropriately, criminality would decrease and fewer prisons and asylums would be needed." Speaking of his childhood outings to the pine woods that still surround Las Piqueñas, a personable local of Carabanchel recalls the relationship between the town's residents and the patients: "The epileptics were harmless, but out of superstition they were seen as dangerous."[4]

Invariably, these centres historically created for the indefinite accommodation of patients with severe epilepsy have adapted with the times. They have been modernised, but have not lost the original purpose for which they were built. For example, the Centre Médical de La Teppe in Tain l'Hermitage (France) now holds 460 beds under the care of eight physicians (neurologists, psychiatrists, and general practitioners) and receives around 2000 outpatient consultations annually from across the country. Like other European centres that have followed a similar development, it provides basic diagnostic and therapeutic services, as

well as physiotherapy and rehabilitation departments.[21] The Swiss Epilepsy Centre, founded in 1886 in Zurich (Switzerland), offers psychological and neuropsychological evaluation and physiotherapy, as well as special education for adults and children, early rehabilitation, social support, and work counselling.[22] Inaugurated in 1897, the famous Filadelfia colony in Dianalund (Denmark) focuses on patients for whom diagnostic and therapeutic management is challenging, as well as offering psychological, educational, and social support.[25]

The vast Las Piqueñas estate saw the construction of a dozen pavilions, with magnificent wooded areas and sports fields, and was run under the direction of the Instituto San José-Hermanos de San Juan de Dios Foundation, the current name of the hospital (Figure 11). The exquisite façade of the building is preserved, although the original chapel and crypt cannot be visited and today are reserved for the monks. There can be no doubt of the centre's excellent current quality and effectiveness in rehabilitation of patients with brain damage and recovering from traumatology surgery, as well as the humanitarian care for terminal patients, provided on a private or semi-private basis. However, the original purpose of the Institute-Asylum was frustrated: the Marquess of Vallejo's intention for the centre had been the care of patients with epilepsy, the losers in this story.

Figure 11. A) Current appearance of the Instituto de San José Foundation, surrounded by a splendid pine forest. B and C) Busts of the founders, the Marquess of Vallejo and brother Benito Menni, are displayed at the entrance to the centre. Both busts lack legends identifying the subjects.

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Conflicts of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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