



NUBIA MENDONÇA BRAZIL

Dr. Nubia Mendonça is a Paediatric Oncologist who has served as the Chief of Department of the Pediatric Oncology Center at Martagão Gesteira Hospital and as President of the Brazilian Society of Paediatric Oncology.

She was born in 1944 in Brazil.

In 1968, she graduated with a degree in Medicine. She then studied Paediatrics and Clinic Laboratory in São Paulo. In 1972, she went back to the Brazilian State of Bahia and began working at Martagão Gesteira Hospital.

In 1976, she contributed to creating the first Pediatric Oncology Center at the same hospital. As a consequence, she went to Buenos Aires, Argentina, to study that specialty.

When she returned, she was nominated as the Chief of Department. In 1978, she moved to Paris and studied under Dr. Odile Schweiguth and Prof. Jean Lemerleat at the Institut Gustave Roussy.

In 1979, she went back to the city of Salvador and continued her work there until 2011.

**"Be courageous,
be empathetic,
and stay
qualified."**

On Relationships that Influenced My Career

Many people had a big influence on me throughout my life. First, my parents—by their example of love, generosity and kindness. Furthermore, during my medical path, I had a professor who impressed me: Prof. Dr. Antonio Jesuino Neto. I had the chance to work with him at two different hospitals, and it was such an extraordinary experience. We treated people who had urgent situations and his manner of listening to the patients, examining them and explaining their diagnosis was something to learn and I reproduced his approach in all my medical life. We also went to the patients' houses occasionally and we could see by ourselves their state of poverty; nevertheless, Prof. Neto would listen, examine and give the right diagnosis with the same kindness. Additionally, above all, he would take into consideration those patients' income when prescribing medicines and drugs that were affordable. He is still my reference.

The second person who was influential during my studies in Paediatrics was the Chief of Fellows, Dr. Maria Clara Faria, at Red Cross Hospital in São Paulo. She knew Paediatrics like no one else, and we had daily meetings with her where we discussed the patient cases. She prepared us how to begin coming up with a diagnosis, and, by elimination, how to reach the correct diagnosis. At the same time, she trained us to give lectures, to discuss our patients in medical sessions and, above all, to listen to every word that a mother or a father of a patient told us, paying much attention, giving value to their words and examining with much care.

On Challenges and Overcoming Them

My first challenge was when I was nominated to serve as the Chief of Department of the Pediatric Oncology Center at Martagão Gesteira Hospital. The service was the first one in the North and Northeast of Brazil and our state had at that time 10+ million citizens. Our patient load was big. The service had 32 beds distributed in 4 infirmaries and 2 apartments for patients who needed to be isolated. As we expected, in a short time, our service became the biggest in our region and the third in number of cases in our country. For me, it was a big challenge because I had studied just two months, at Hospital de Niños, in Buenos Aires, under the supervision of Dr. Angela Cebrián Bonasena, Dr. Enrique Schwartman and Dr. Frederico Sackmann Muriel. I studied a lot when I came back and I worked with my fellows which helped me very much.

The second challenge was when I became President of the Brazilian Society of Paediatric Oncology in 1985. Our Society was relatively small and members didn't know each other. With my colleagues, we began finding ways to get everyone acquainted with each other, from those working in the small service centres to the those in the biggest ones. We achieved that in two years. I was President for 3 more years. Finally, we consolidated our Society as the biggest

one in Latin America.

Those 2 challenges made me know that when we really want something, we can achieve our objectives. Sometimes, with more effort, other times, with less, but, we can't give up. Life prepares challenges and hurdles to teach us ways of progressing and how we can become stronger. I learned very much from those 2 experiences.

On Balancing Career and Other Life Responsibilities

Since I was 5 years old I said that I would be a doctor. During all my life, I didn't change my mind. So, when I was 18 years old, I began to study Medicine, but I didn't know what specialty I should do. I studied a lot and I was the best student in my group. When I was in my last university year, I decided to become a Paediatrician. This decision was influenced by Dr. Jamal Wehba, a fellow at that time, who showed me the beauty of being a Paediatrician.

I didn't think very much about my private life back then because the only thing that I desired was to be a good doctor. So, I went to São Paulo to study Paediatrics at Red Cross Hospital. At that hospital, I saw for a first time children with cancer (leukemia, lymphoma and solid tumors), and that was tough for me.

I didn't think about marriage or other life responsibilities. I just thought about Medicine. I worked hard. And I was very happy back then. Moreover, I was never worried about balancing my life and other life responsibilities. And, I didn't have to justify my choices in life. I continue being single, without any children.

My Words of Wisdom for the Next Generation of Female Leaders

The advice that I would give myself at age 25 is to continue studying hard, to continue looking up to people such as Dr. Maria Clara Faria and trying to be a good doctor. Life made me decide to study Paediatric Oncology when I was 32 years old, by chance, influenced by my first Paediatric Oncology service in Bahia.

So, for the younger generation of professionals who want to be Paediatric Oncologists, I would say: be courageous, be empathetic, and stay qualified. It's a long way to go, you will find moments of success, but there will also be times of sadness when we can't save our patients. But, don't give up! When you will get older, you'll have a lot of experiences to tell to the younger doctors and fellows and you'll see that you made the difference in the lives of a lot of families. You'll be happy!