

From succor station to a trauma concentration center: The history of the Balbuena General Hospital

Del puesto de socorro a un centro de concentración de trauma: Historia del Hospital General Balbuena

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Keywords:

Balbuena, emergency, trauma, surgery, Mexico City.

Palabras clave:

Balbuena, urgencias, trauma, cirugía, Ciudad de México.

ABSTRACT

The health services of Mexico City cannot be conceived without first mentioning the Central Succor Station, which was created in 1909 and whose primary function was to provide a rapid response to the bloody incidents in Mexico City. In 1962 the then-known Balbuena Hospital which was created, initially dedicated, like its predecessor, to attending emergencies that were derived from violent acts. Nevertheless, this institution needed to train medical personnel with experience in trauma that was demanded. For this reason, in 1976 a general surgery residency was formally created with recognition by the UNAM, which until today has graduated more than 2,000 general surgeons. In 1984, the Balbuena Hospital acquired the category of General Hospital. In 1986, it became the venue of the first generation of Emergency residents, thus laying the foundations of this specialty in the country. In the last decade, the Balbuena General Hospital has strengthened protocols of immediate attention in medical, surgical and obstetric-gynecological emergencies, such as the "Mater Code", a strategic protocol for gynecologic emergencies and laid the foundations of a "Trauma Code", becoming thus one of the most experienced and recognized trauma hospitals in the country.

RESUMEN

Los servicios de salud de la Ciudad de México no pueden concebirse sin antes mencionar el Puesto Central de Socorro, el cual fue creado en 1909 y cuya función primordial era dar respuesta rápida y expedita a los hechos sangrientos suscitados en la Ciudad de México. Fue en el año de 1962 cuando se creó el entonces conocido Hospital de Balbuena, dedicado inicialmente, al igual que su antecesor, a atender urgencias que se derivaban de hechos violentos; sin embargo, dicha institución necesitaba formar al personal médico con experiencia en trauma que éste mismo demandaba, por tal razón, en 1976 se creó formalmente el curso de cirugía general con reconocimiento de la UNAM, el cual ha forjado en sus quirófanos hasta el día de hoy a más de 2,000 cirujanos generales. En el año de 1984, adquirió la denominación de Hospital General Balbuena y, en 1986, fungió como sede de la primera generación de residentes de Urgencias Médico-Quirúrgicas, sentando las bases de esta especialidad en el país. En la última década, el Hospital General Balbuena ha fortalecido los protocolos de atención inmediata en las urgencias médicas, quirúrgicas y gineco-obstétricas, fortaleciendo el "Código Mater" y sentando las bases para el desarrollo del "Código Trauma", logrando al día de hoy ser uno de los hospitales de trauma con más experiencia y reconocimiento del país.

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Received: 15/11/2018
Accepted: 30/03/2019



INTRODUCTION

The medical services of the Secretariat of Health of Mexico City constitute an interdisciplinary organization that provides

a free and obligatory municipal service to their citizens, most of the time with great deficiencies, but a lot of professionalism and vocation. Telling these memories is a difficult and uncertain task. With little

How to cite: Meza-López LR, Ramírez-Marín Y, Mejía-Consuelos G, Carballo-Cruz FJ, Lujan-Mendoza KI, López-Belmont K. From succor station to a trauma concentration center: The history of the Balbuena General Hospital. *Cir Gen*. 2019; 41(2): 119-125.

written material, mostly the product of oral information and comments from actors in this great story, some of their data is difficult to verify.¹

The history of this hospital network has been forged in blood and sacrifice. From its inception in the care of the wounded from the warlike conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the evolution from succor station to hospital was arduous, and required innumerable efforts by many people of the more than 10 affiliated hospitals, among them Xoco, La Villa, "Dr. Rubén Leñero", and Balbuena.

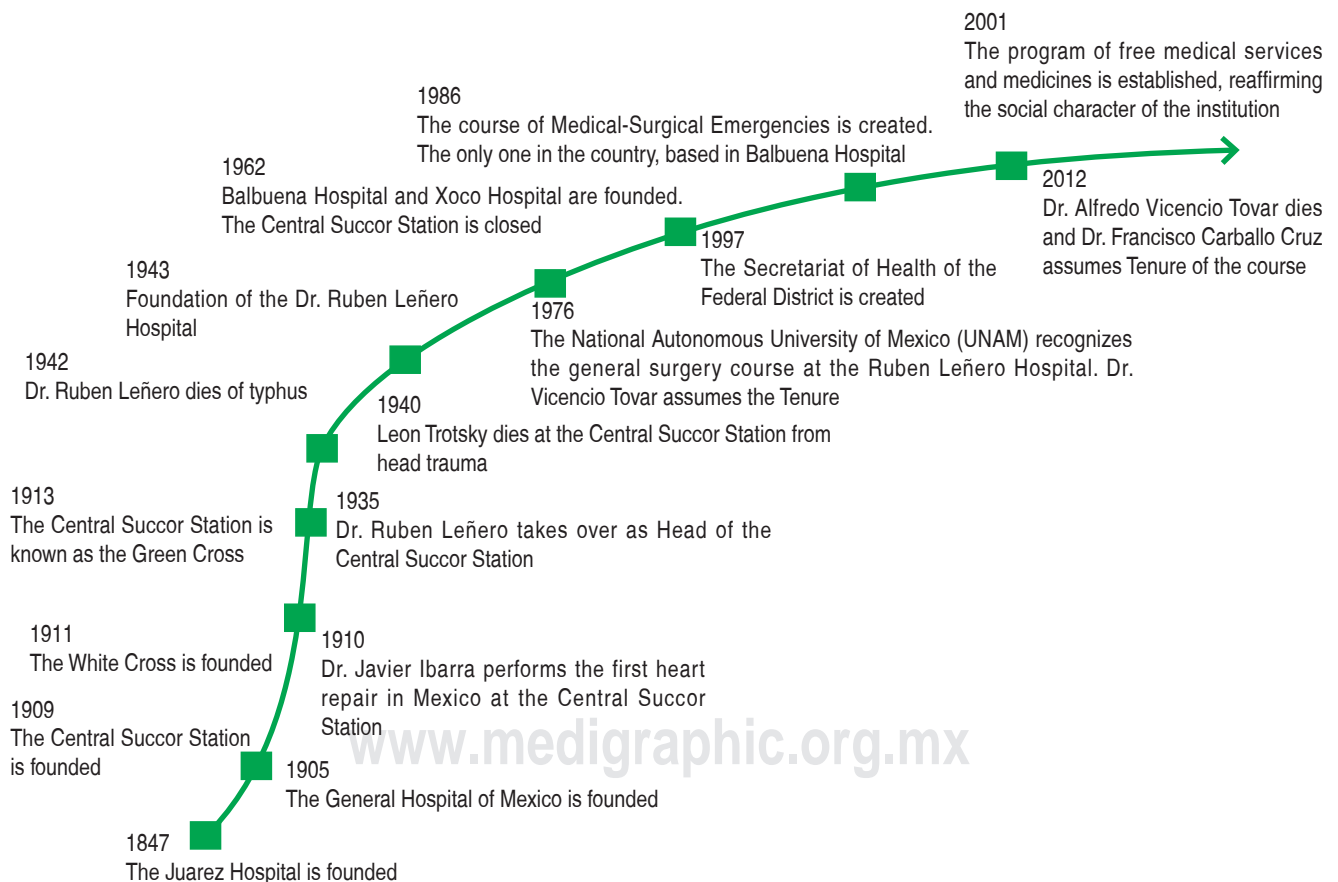
It is impossible to overlook the development and importance achieved at healthcare, teaching, rehabilitation, and research. Therefore, our own and others must know part of the rich history that has constituted

what is currently known as the Secretariat of Health of Mexico City and, specifically, the Balbuena General Hospital.

HISTORY MEDICAL AND SURGICAL EMERGENCIES IN MEXICO CITY

The Balbuena General Hospital is part of the hospital network of the Secretariat of Health of Mexico City. Its origins go back to the creation of the Central Succor Post at the beginning of the 20th Century, focused on attending, in synergy with the Juarez Hospital, the trauma emergencies of the city.

The Juarez Hospital was founded in 1847 in the turbulence of the post-independence social changes.² In this hospital, medical-surgical emergencies triggered by violent events were attended to within the newly



Source: Self made.

Figure 1: Chronology of the development of public health services in Mexico City and general surgery.

created capital of the Mexican Republic (Figure 1). Unfortunately, this hospital could not cover all the demands for traumatic emergencies, so a group of enthusiastic doctors with the support of the then governor of the Federal District, Mr. Guillermo de Landa y Escandón, and with the approval of the Secretariat of the Interior, created the 15th of December 1909, the Central Succor Station, in the sixth police delegation, on the corner of Victoria and Revillagigedo streets³ (Figure 2).

The Central Succor Station had a few beds and a space to perform surgeries. The initial staff was made of a Chief of Service, five on-call physicians, three practitioners, and three nurses. Soon, it was known as the “Green Cross”, as a need for a different identification of the two ambulances available at that time (and which bore a red cross as a symbol). Dr. Javier Ibarra, based on the fact that the post was located on the then called Green St., formerly known as Victoria St., changed the red color of the vehicle crosses to green.⁴ Its main function focused on the care of simple trauma from different Police stations since more problematic cases were directed to the Juarez Hospital (Figures 3 and 4). Since its inception, The Succor Post cared for the wounded of both sides of the Revolution, until 1913, when it ceased activities under the regime of dictator Victoriano Huerta, only to resume

activities in 1921, in an environment of scarce materials and personnel.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the limits of Mexico City covered Slaughterhouse Av. and Francisco Morazán Av. (today Eduardo Molina and Congress Avenues), as well as Circunvalación Av. (parallel to La Merced Market), which joined Viga Causeway. On the other hand, the Police delegation belonged to two districts, Mexico City and Guadalupe Hidalgo.⁶ In 1918 this area, despite its proximity to downtown Mexico City, had little development. On the other hand, the neighborhoods of La Merced and La Candelaria, as well as Morelos, Romero Rubio, and Moctezuma neighborhoods lacked water, electricity, and pavement.⁷

Given the increase in services and the growth of the city between the 1933 and 1934, four peripheral succor posts were established to cover the needs, these posts were named as follows: Succor Post no. 1 Balbuena, Succor Post no. 2 Santa Julia, Succor Post no. 3 Mixcoac, Succor Post no. 4 General Anaya.⁷

BIRTH OF THE BALBUENA HOSPITAL

It was not until April 24, 1962, when President Adolfo López Mateos, inaugurated the Balbuena Emergency and Traumatology Hospital, which began operations on May



Courtesy: Mr. Raúl Razo and Dr. Francisco Carballo.

Figure 2: (A) Medical practitioner, officer, stretcher-bearer. (B) Complete medical staff of the Central Succor Post.



Courtesy: Dr. Francisco Carballo and Mr. Raúl Razo.

Figure 3: Mobility and transfer team at the Central Succor Post and the Balbuena General Hospital from 1933 to 2018.



Courtesy: Mr. Raúl Razo.

Figure 4: Report of the first surgical intervention in the Central Succor Post, 1909.

1st., with Dr. Luis Jiménez Abad acting as director. Dr. Armando León Bejarano (who would later become governor of the state of Morelos) as deputy director, and Dr. Aída Esperanza as head of nurses. Completing the initial template were: Dr. Óscar Beltrán (head of orthopedics), Dr. Gregorio González Mariscal (head of neurosurgery), Dr. Caballero (head of urology), Dr. Nicolás Sautter (head of ophthalmology), Dr. César Gutiérrez Samperio (head of general surgery), Dr. Gabino Casales Ortiz (head of abdomen surgery), Dr. Oseguera (head of reconstructive surgery), Dr. Augusto Martínez Elías (head of thoracic surgery), Dr. Herrera Franyuti (head of the emergency department), and Dr. Luis Alarcón (head of maxillofacial surgery).

Dr. Jiménez Abad was succeeded by Dr. Juan Manuel Cisneros Arjona and Dr. Ricardo Perera Merino. During its first year,



Courtesy: Dr. Francisco Carballo.

Figure 5: Patient admitted to the emergency department of the Balbuena General Hospital after the 1985 earthquake.

the Balbuena Hospital had emergency, and traumatology and orthopedics services attending to more than 12,000 patients a year, with 123 beds. The Balbuena General Hospital arose out of the need to provide emergency care service to the populous eastern area of the city, which caused the Succor Stations 1, 2, and 3 to disappear permanently. In a short time, it became one of the hospitals with the highest demand for trauma services due to its proximity to the neighborhoods of La Candelaria de Los Patos and Tepito, as well as La Merced and Lagunilla markets; all of these characterized by both, their important commercial activity and criminal incidence. The experience acquired by the surgeons who worked there was extensive, both in thoracic and abdominal injuries, due to a large number of trauma patients treated.⁸ Subsequently, the Public Ministry Agency was built, which intervened in all legal processes and provided authorization to carry out medico-legal autopsies when required.^{7,8}

The same year the Balbuena General Hospital was inaugurated, the Emergency Hospital of Coyoacán was inaugurated, now known as Xoco General Hospital, located in

the Xoco neighborhood, Coyoacán, with Dr. José Manuel Cisneros Arjona as director. By then, Mexico City's medical services had the three emergency hospitals, seven children's hospitals, two sanatoriums, medical services at the preventive prison, in the women's prison, in the men's penitentiary, medical sections in 25 local and foreign police delegations and 14 clinics.^{1,4}

In 1983, the restoration of the hospitals dependent on the General Directorate of Medical Services of the Federal District Department (as it was known at the time) began. Thanks to the management of Dr. José Navarro Robles, and later of Dr. Robles Castañón Romo, the Balbuena hospital was completely remodeled in 1984, becoming the Balbuena General Hospital, and incorporated services of general surgery, medicine internal, gynecology-obstetrics, pediatrics, and primary care. However, despite the name change, people still know the hospital as the Cruz Verde, The Green Cross of Balbuena.^{7,8}

On August 16, 1985, a new Hospital Tower with 210 beds was inaugurated with four operating rooms and an equipment and sterilization center, the ICU (with twelve beds), and the respiratory therapy area. This infrastructure faced a growing demand for medical care at the time after the earthquake of September 19 (Figure 5).^{7,8}

In 1986 a medical-surgical emergencies specialty was created, and the Balbuena General Hospital became the first to house this residence, laying the foundations for the training of the country's first emergency physicians. On April 25, 1987, remodeling works were completed in the surgical unit, in the areas of consultation, nurseries, and the third floor of the hospitalization tower, which began operations on December 13, 1988. On March 15, 1990, the Balbuena Health Information Center was created, which provides an extensive bibliography and electronic services of biomedical information search.^{7,8}

The intensive remodeling tasks continued. The consultation area was expanded again,⁷ in 1992 the traumatology and shock unit, on June 1st., 1995, the burned-patients' unit, with six

beds. Since 1996 it was recognized as a Child-And-Mother friendly hospital.^{7,8}

In August 1997, new remodeling works, outpatient services, blood bank, emergencies, x-rays, dermal injury unit, garbage containers, etc. were reconditioned, with a total of 647.54 m² surface. Finally, in 2000, the certification was received from the General Health Council.⁷

Of the many famous people who have walked through its corridors, we can name Dr. Rodolfo Herrera Barragán, Dr. Luis García Irazoqui, one of the first surgeons to perform thoracotomies in the emergency department, Dr. Alberto Chousleb Kalach, pioneer of endoscopic surgery in the country, Drs. Mariano Hernández López, Héctor Treviño Meré, Nicolás Elizalde Ángeles, Francisco Javier Carballo (full professor of general surgery); and Dr. Gabriel Mejía Consuelos (currently Head of the General Surgery Department).⁸

We cannot fail to mention the role of the Balbuena General Hospital in the training of health professionals from various educational institutions such as UNAM, IPN, public, private and military schools, as well as multiple professionals, nutritionists, nurses, doctors, social workers, respiratory therapists, among others, etc. The merit is greater if one considers that even though the classrooms are few, the number of students is large, and this has allowed it to position itself as one of the best health human resources training centers in the hospital network.

RESIDENCY IN GENERAL SURGERY

In 1965, as a consequence of the medical strike of residents, the full-time residence was decreed in the hospitals of the Secretariat of Health of Mexico City, 20 resident doctors were accepted per hospital during that year, who could specialize in general surgery, orthopedics and traumatology and plastic and reconstructive surgery.⁸

Despite the intense care and practice activity that characterized these hospitals, it was necessary to establish a study program and teaching system compatible and standardizable with the rest of the health

institutions. This was achieved in 1976, thanks to the efforts of doctors Alfredo Vicencio Tovar, Rubén Zolache and Héctor Treviño (who served as Head of Teaching of the General Directorate of Medical Services of the Federal District), when he obtained university recognition for general surgery, plastic and reconstructive surgery, and orthopedics and traumatology before the UNAM.⁸

Special mention is deserved by Dr. Alfredo Vicencio Tovar, a teacher and architect in the training of large numbers of surgeons at the Secretariat of Health of Mexico City, and full professor of general surgery from 1976 to 2012, training more than 2,000 general surgeons.

CONCLUSION

Since its inception, with the Central Succor Station, the Balbuena General Hospital has developed parallel to the political and social history of Mexico, nurturing and preserving, to this day, great precepts resulting from the Mexican Revolution. The importance of the Balbuena General Hospital in the development of general emergency surgery in the country is invaluable both, for its historical and healthcare components and its training of specialists. For this reason, 56 years after its foundation, the Balbuena General Hospital is still building its history.

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