

## In Memoriam



Guillermo (Willy) Alejandro Suárez, MD (1960–2006)

Guillermo (Willy) Alejandro Suárez, M.D. died peacefully at home on December 16, 2006, after 20 months of a courageous, unyielding fight against oral cancer. Willy was born in Mendoza, Argentina, on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1960. He attended Medical School at the National University of Cuyo in Mendoza, where he graduated with honors. He then moved to Boston, where he completed an internship at the Worcester City Hospital, a fellowship in internal medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, a residence in neurology at Boston City Hospital, and a fellowship in EMG and neuromuscular diseases at Tufts-New England Medical Center. In 1991 he came to the Mayo Clinic, in Rochester, MN, where he remained for the last 15 years of his life. At Mayo, he completed a fellowship in peripheral nerve diseases with Dr Peter J. Dyck, and a research fellowship in autonomic nervous system with Dr Phillip A. Low. He received the Mayo Scholarship Award to pursue studies in genetics at McGill University and

was appointed Consultant in Neurology in 1993.

He made important contributions in the fields of peripheral neuropathy and autonomic disorders. These include the demonstration of the efficacy of peripheral blood stem cell transplantation in POEMS neuropathy, the characterization of dropped head syndrome, the recognition of the immune basis of brachial plexus neuropathy, the elucidation of the clinical, neurophysiological, and pathological features of localized hypertrophic neuropathy and idiopathic autonomic neuropathy, the identification of risk factors for sudden cardiac death in diabetes mellitus, and the development of the Autonomic Symptom Profile, a widely used instrument to assess autonomic symptoms. He was promoted to Associate Professor of Neurology and served as Head of a section of neurology at Mayo. He was member of several medical societies. His expertise on peripheral nerve and autonomic disorders was widely recognized both in the United States and abroad. He frequently participated in courses organized by the American Academy of Neurology and was often invited as a speaker or Visiting Professor in Europe and South America. Willy was also actively involved in several NIH and industry funded research projects on peripheral neuropathy associated with diabetes or monoclonal gammopathies, neurofibromatosis, and orthostatic intolerance.

The feature that characterized Willy throughout all his personal and professional endeavors was excellence. He was an astute clinician, inspiring mentor, and above all, a caring physician loved by his patients.

In addition to his academic achievements, Willy was an excellent athlete. He was one of the best tennis players of his time in Argentina and he played competi-

tive tennis at the National level, was state champion, and represented his University, Mendoza, and his country several times. In Rochester, he played competitive soccer and coached a large number of children in the Rochester youth programs over the past 15 years.

Above all, Willy was an excellent friend, husband, and father. He was always a supportive yet reliably critical friend. It was inspiring to witness Willy analyze a particular problem, ranging from reviewing a manuscript to providing advice on a personal dilemma. He took every task very seriously and devoted as much time and passion as needed to succeed, as always, with excellence, be it a neurologic problem, a barbecue, or a coaching session. Willy was absolutely devoted to his beloved wife, Mariana, and his two children, Nicolas and Julieta, with whom he shared his passion for life and nature, his spirituality, and his optimism. His legacy was already evident to all of us who witnessed the courage and moral strength with which his family supported him throughout the unimaginably difficult last months of his life. To all of us who had the privilege to know Willy and spend time with him during these last months, he taught his most important lesson: how to live and die with dignity. Even in the darkest days, he never complained and always expressed concern and was apologetic for the sorrow he was causing. While he lost the physical battle, he won the spiritual one. There are few who, after only 46 years of life, can leave such a legacy. We will all miss Willy. We will also turn to our memories of this remarkable human being when we face situations that we perceive as desperate and unsolvable. As always, Willy will be there to help.

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