Professor Aurelio Rapado died on June 25th 2002. Aurelio was, for the people who knew him, a person with the dual quality of being a great clinical researcher and an exceptional human being. There are many people in Spain today who owe much to him for his unquestionable encouragement and support in the field of bone metabolism disorders, where he has been the foremost clinical physician of recent decades. His sudden demise on June 25th has left all of his friends and colleagues bereft, consoled only by that Indian proverb that reminds us that a maestro never disappears so long as his memory remains in the hearts and minds of his students.

From a professional and scientific standpoint, Aurelio Rapado came from Badajoz to Madrid and completed his studies in medicine in 1959, after which he received basic clinical and research training at the Clínica de la Concepción under the direct supervision of Professor Jiménez Díaz, followed by training periods at bone and mineral metabolism units in Copenhagen, Leeds, London, Rochester and Bethesda during the 1960s. With this experience, he started the first monographic laboratory in Spain devoted to mineral metabolism and bone disorders, at the Jiménez Díaz Foundation, where he implemented the use of various parathyroid activity indices, bone remodelling markers and RIA determination of calcitropic hormones. Since 1974, numerous specialists have passed through his Bone Metabolism Unit to learn about the metabolic balances and functional studies related with bone pathology, as well as to attend the specialized Outpatients Clinic there, which has become a national reference standard. With the incorporation of modern methods for the measurement of bone mass, the Unit became after 1982 a pioneering centre at international scale for clinical and epidemiological studies as well as clinical trials.

Of his long and fruitful research activity, I should only like to recall now Aurelio’s recent participation as one of the leaders in the GTO study, with the participation of numerous hospitals in Spain, which has allowed the values of bone mineral density to be obtained for our population. He was one of the principal investigators in the MEDOS, EVOS and EPOS studies which have established the clinical characteristics of fractures in the Mediterranean area, their incidence at a European level and finally the natural history of asymptomatic fractures, all studies of evident repercussions for clinicians through both the descriptions they contain and their publication in significant journals. In the area of basic research, the most outstanding are his studies into the measurement of ionic calcium and isoenzymes of serum alkaline phosphatase, the handling of phosphorus and magnesium in kidney tubules, the role of the new biochemical markers of bone remodelling, the physiological effects of calcitonin and several papers on the subject of nephrolithiasis.

In his teaching guise, his activities as Senior Lecturer in Medicine were constant, extending from undergraduate to doctoral courses. In fact, he was just recently planning his next doctoral course on bone metabolism disorders for the next academic year, which would have been his twenty-fifth and in the organization of which we have had the opportunity to participate. Within his Unit, Professor Rapado directed 14 doctoral theses dealing with the metabolism of phosphorus and calcium. In the last two years, he also actively participated in the organization of the postgraduate course for the Mediterranean Osteoporosis Society, where he chaired round tables and taught classes to students from all over Europe.

In the course of his career, he published 23 books, over a thousand articles in scientific journals and has contributed chapters to more than 60 books and presented over 700 communications at Conferences and Round Tables in Spain and abroad. He sat on the Editorial Committee of about 27 scientific journals, including some of enormous prestige such as Osteoporosis International and the Journal of Musculoskeletal and Neuronal Interactions.

Nonetheless, I should like to refer to his human qualities, for Aurelio Rapado was widely respected and much loved. He was a permanent source of support for all of us who have wanted to research calcium metabolism and his unceasing example of constant meticulous work has stimulated our daily medical practice, so much so that he can be considered as one of the founders of our Spanish Society for Bone Investigation and Mineral Metabolism, which has definitively brought together all the professionals working in this sector, and also the FHOEMO, a Foundation characterized by its distribution of study grants to young researchers, as well as its considerable social efforts and its promotion of training in the field of osteoporosis. For all of us, Aurelio Rapado has been a great teacher and researcher, but for some of us he will also be remembered as a great friend whose memory we will cherish.