

# FINAL WORD

*Cleber Paccola, Professor of Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgery at the Ribeirão Preto School of Medicine, São Paulo, Brazil, died on 22 June 2011*



Life sometimes brings surprises which we would prefer not to experience. For me, one such surprise was the severe disease which afflicted Professor Cleber Paccola some four years ago. This appeared tantamount to a death sentence, one to be executed not too far from then. However, after a delicate neurosurgical procedure, from which he recovered with no evident sequelae, he resumed his professional activities barely a month later. His determination not to let himself collapse was clear.

In the remaining four years of his life, Cleber, as I knew him, fought courageously and submitted himself to a number of treatments. Despite these, there was an unfortunate decline in his condition. However, at no stage did I witness a loss of character or hope. Cleber always showed great courage, perhaps because he believed that he was cured. Relatively religious, he did not fight God, but occasionally would ask Him the reason for such suffering. Cleber's disease returned in October 2010, taking his life prematurely eight months later. He still submitted himself to heavy chemotherapy but then suffered a stroke, leading to his hospitalisation. Even so he believed he would recover and be back at work in a few weeks. This was his way to face life, courageously overcoming problems and difficulties.

Cleber was born in Lençóis Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil in 1948. I knew him well, both at work and socially, from our very first meeting. Then, he was a final-year medical student and I was a first-year orthopaedic resident, in 1972. In December of that year he graduated as one of the best students of his 80-student group and decided to become an orthopaedic surgeon. He was studious, always carrying a book and sometimes asking the residents difficult questions, while confronting them with the text in the book. We soon became partners, running outpatient clinics, performing operations and studying together. Moreover, our wives also became close friends. Those were good times, when we both contributed to the development of our department. Of course, our relationship was not always smooth, since we both had strong personalities. Sometimes we would even have noisy quarrels. Yet here appeared another trace of Cleber's personality; he never kept his anger, acting the next moment as if nothing had happened.

Cleber's career proceeded impeccably. Once he finished his residency in 1974, he applied for the national examination to obtain specialty certification. He gained first place in January 1975 among almost 250 candidates nationwide. Cleber was soon immersed in the postgraduate programme of our institution and presented his doctoral thesis in January 1978. In October that year he started his one-year postdoctoral studies with Professor Harald Tscherne in Hannover, Germany, where he had the chance to develop a deep understanding of the AO philosophy for the treatment of skeletal trauma. On his return to Brazil, in December 1978, Cleber was asked to modernise the management of trauma in our department. Steadily he transmitted his new knowledge regionally, then nationally and subsequently

internationally. He was soon affiliated to the AO Foundation and became a trustee for Brazil. Cleber gained an international reputation, being regularly invited to many scientific meetings as a result.

A dedicated doctor, Cleber was assiduous in the running of his busy practice. He would see as many as 300 patients each week and would personally perform most of the operations. A conscientious professor, in 1993 Cleber also introduced a one-year residency programme in knee and lower-limb trauma surgery in our department. This resulted in the training of more than 50 specialists, two of whom, Mauricio Kfuri Junior and Flavio Luiz Garcia, became members of the department staff. This made Cleber particularly proud.

His inquiring mind steered him towards research into many different matters. He was concerned with the low-income regions of Brazil and other countries, so developed a low-cost locked intramedullary nail for the fixation of femoral shaft fractures but without the need for fluoroscopy. Latterly, Cleber developed a motorised computer-controlled external fixator, to study the influence of different lengthening speeds on callus formation. He was also known for his contributions on the subject of corrective osteotomies for angular deformities of the femur and tibia. Cleber's many publications reflect this intense research activity. He was also very proud of the large number of orthopaedic specialists and postgraduate students who had been trained under his guidance. Many are now recognised nationwide.

Conscious from the beginning of his true value as a recognised professor, Cleber steadily climbed the many steps of our university career ladder. He started as a teaching assistant in 1976, then became an assistant professor PhD in 1978. From there he became private docent in 1984, associate professor in 1986 and full professor in 1995. Despite his full-time dedication to our department, he disliked bureaucracy. This was why he never applied for the post of head of department.

Interestingly, Cleber was dedicated to few sports. After giving up soccer, perhaps not his favourite game, he dedicated himself to tennis. He approached this in much the same way as he handled medicine. He would ally theoretical studies using books and videos to practical lessons with instructors, as well as real matches. He soon became a good player, although was sometimes seen questioning the referee's decision whenever there was doubt over a point. In more recent years, Cleber decided to play golf, confronting this sport in the same way he handled tennis; eventually he became a very reasonable player.

Cleber had many excellent attributes and is an enormous loss. His premature death has left a great emptiness in many people's lives, particularly from a personal standpoint. My only consolation is the memory of the many good moments we had together. Cleber Paccola will be sorely missed.

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