The Legacy of Lucio and Latapí: A Brief History

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Rafael Lucio Nájera and Fernando Latapí contributed greatly to the knowledge about a specific form of diffuse lepromatous leprosy, now known as Lucio-Latapí leprosy. This condition is characterized by generalized, diffuse infiltration without nodules, alopecia of the eyebrows, eyelashes, and body, and anhidrosis and dysesthesias. It can also have a reactional state known as Lucio’s phenomenon, which presents with necrotic erythema and ulceration of vessels. Lucio, a Mexican physician, published work describing this type of leprosy in 1851. However, this condition was mostly isolated to Mexico and Costa Rica. For this reason, it garnered little attention until it was brought to light again by Latapí in 1936.

Lucio graduated from the Establishment of Medical Sciences in Mexico City. He was the director of San Lazaro Hospital where he extensively researched leprosy. He and Dr. Ignacio Alvarado published work describing different types of leprosy, including Lucio-Latapí leprosy. This publication provided clinical descriptions and insights into pathogenesis, therapeutic concepts, and epidemiology that are relevant to date and that served as a foundation for other scholars.

Latapí founded the Mexican Society of Dermatology and the Mexican School of Leprology. The latter aimed to change laws against people with leprosy and promote respectful treatment towards them. He worked to abolish misconceptions about leprosy, and created brigades to diagnose thousands of patients. At the Mexican Association of Action Against Leprosy, he successfully treated many patients in a time when leprosy was thought to be incurable. This center became the Ladislao De La Pascua Dermatologic Center, which continues to teach Mexican dermatologists today.

These physicians are pioneers in the field of lepromatous disease. Their work also reminds us of the physician’s role in educating and advocating for our patients.

Figure 1. Rafael Lucio Nájera (left) and Fernando Latapí (right)
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