

Carles Torner

## Vitorino de Queiroz:

### Health-care co-operatives being established in Portugal

Last July, a delegation of Portuguese doctors, accompanied by professor Vitorino de Queiroz, an expert on the co-operative system in Europe, guest professor in different universities and currently the main advisor to the Portuguese Minister of Education within the framework of the Private and Co-operative Teaching Co-ordinator Council, visited Barcelona hospital. The doctors were members of the Independent Doctors' Union of Portugal and the Portuguese General Practitioners' Association, and their visit was aimed at learning about the Sociedad Cooperativa de Instalaciones de Asistencia Sanitaria (SCIAS) and Barcelona hospital management. The meeting included a large number of questions related to health-care co-operative systems: How do users participate in hospital management? How are physicians' and users' points of view coordinated in a health-care co-operative based on the Espriu model? How are management agreements reached in a users' co-operative with thousands of members, such as SCIAS, especially for the complex management of a hospital like this?

The visit had a concrete objective: an encounter shortly to be held in Lisbon between European co-operative members, specifically related to health-care. And we also received the good news of a health-care co-operative to be established in Portugal. Professor Queiroz described the conception of an ambitious project.



Josep M. Ferreira

## Why do you think that this is the right moment to establish a health-care co-operative in Portugal?

The European Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance will take place in Lisbon from October 9 to 11. As usual, during the European assembly, there will also be an encounter of the International Health-care Co-operative Organisation (IHCO). We will be present with important news: the creation of three health-care co-operatives in Portugal.

## What process has been followed to establish the three health-care co-operatives?

The Independent Physicians' Union and the General Practitioners' Association met with the University of Lisbon and the Portuguese Federation of Co-operatives to set the bases for a legal framework, and a new practice in the co-operative field. Because there have previously been no health-care co-operatives in Portugal.

## What will the three co-operatives, to be created in October, be like?

These three co-operatives have to launch the health-care co-operative movement in Portugal. This is intended to be a bridge leading to the future: we will promote training, information, co-operative management, care, coordination... It will be a system at the disposal of doctors working in primary care areas in hospitals. The first will be a nursery co-operative favouring the appearance of more co-operatives in the sector. The second will be a co-operative training doctors in the technical management of health-care co-operatives. The third will produce suitable social products: co-operative insurance, miscellaneous complements, etc., both for doctors and users. These three initial co-operatives will create a framework to boost the health-care co-operative system in our country.

## Which will be the role of each of the agents currently involved in the co-operative health-care system in Portugal?

The University of Lisbon will contribute from an academic perspective, preparing specific curricula for the co-operative health-care system, and the Portuguese Confederation of Co-operatives will provide coordination, experience and resources. The two medical institutions, the Independent Physicians' Union and the General Practitioners' Association, will create the conditions required for all Portuguese doctors and health-care professions to benefit from the experience of Catalonia, Madrid or Brazil, where the Unimed health-



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: Doctor Daniel Arquijo, representing the Portuguese Independent Physicians' Union, Doctor Eduardo Mendes, representing the Portuguese General Practitioners' Association, and Doctor Carlos Aroz, also from the union.

care co-operative is based, or other countries associated to the IHCO.

## When will the co-operatives be created?

On October 7, in Lisbon, one day before the European assemblies of the ACI and the IHCO, there will be a study and discussion seminar, supported by the University of Lisbon, the Espriu Foundation and the Portugal-Catalonia Foundation, among others. We will spend the whole day considering the development of health-care co-operatives. We will start with the Spanish and Catalan experience and perform an in-depth analysis in order to identify the perspectives for Portugal. Portugal is starting from the beginning. There are medical co-operatives, but they are established as service co-operatives, and not in the sense of a co-operative health-care system. We have co-operatives in other sectors covered by the International Co-operative Alliance, agricultural co-operatives, consumers' co-operatives, etc. But not in the health sector. This is why we have decided to start with the three matrix co-operatives.

## What will be the Espriu Foundation's contribution?

Your experience in the co-operative health-care system, both doctors and users. It would be a good idea for the hundred participants at the October 7 seminar to have the special issue of *Compartir* on the co-operative health-care system (October, 2001), which provides such a good description of its history and current experience.

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