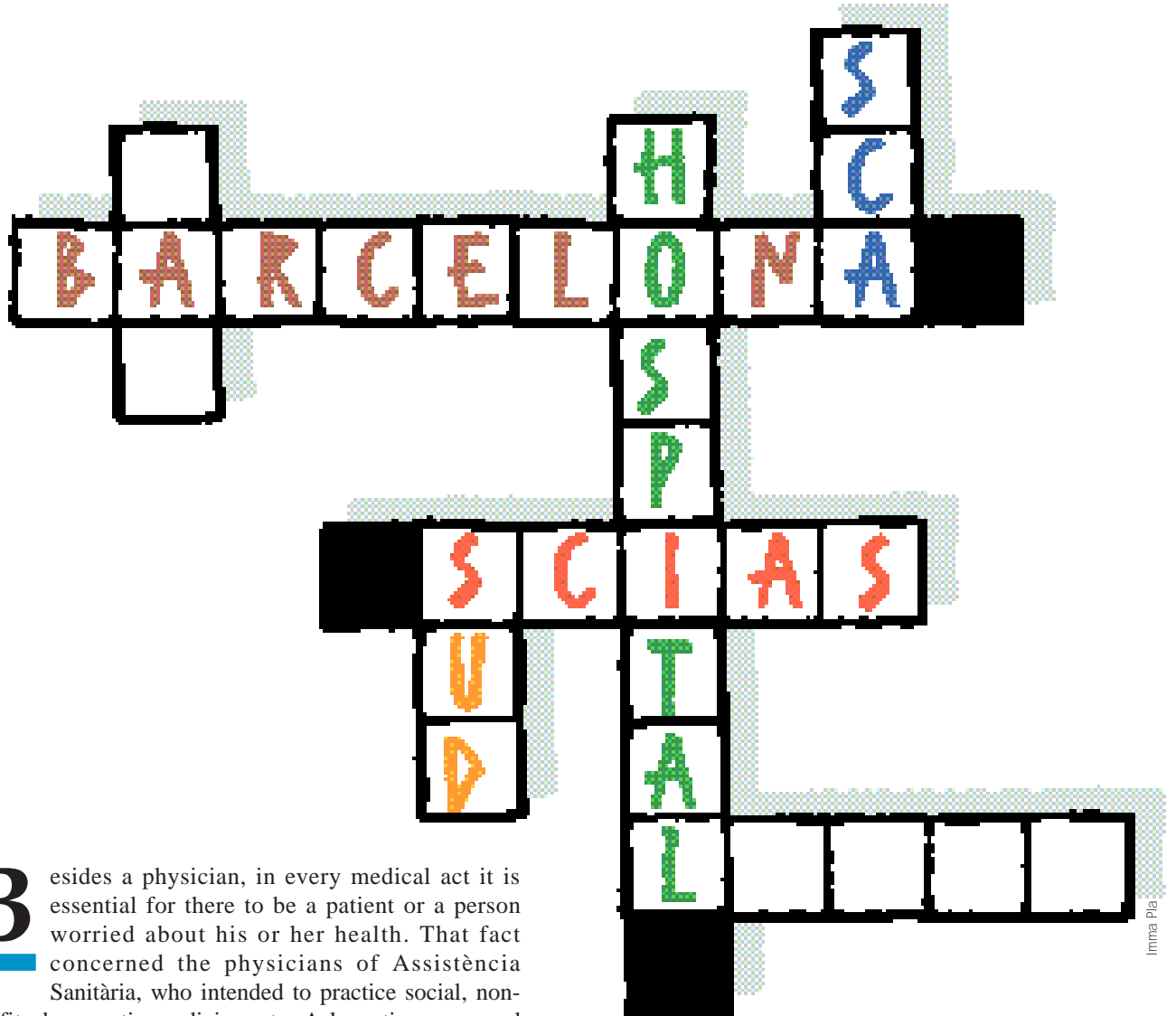


Isabel Bonet

## SCIAS, patients also have a say



**B**esides a physician, in every medical act it is essential for there to be a patient or a person worried about his or her health. That fact concerned the physicians of Assistència Sanitària, who intended to practice social, non-profit, democratic medicine, etc. A long time ago, and because of that concern, they unsuccessfully tried to set up an association called Amigos de la Medicina to act as the voice of service users. Despite that failure, a user cooperative was quickly founded. Exercising their legitimate rights as the protagonists of healthcare, they decided to make use of that voice. But not only their voice, because they also decided to move into action and confront the alarming shortage of hospital beds by proposing the objective of building and managing hospitals and health facilities in general.

SCIAS, Societat Cooperativa d'Instal·lacions Sanitàries, came into being at the end of 1974, but it was not until 1989, some 15 years later, that the first cooperative hospital in the world of this nature opened: Hospital de Barcelona.

Fifteen years is too long a period to be forgotten. They were 15 years of trust. Many members placed their bets on and believed in the goodness of a system, the one that Doctor Espriu had proposed. They were also paying

Imma Pla



fees, minimal needless to say, yet the co-operative had nothing to offer them in return. I honestly do not think that the model would be easy to duplicate. We are not used to giving without receiving anything in return, except hope and faith in a better future. And that was what it was really all about: believing in a future in which the voice of those who need to receive healthcare was listened to just as much as the voice of those providing it.

### **SCIAS: a 170,000-member reality**

SCIAS is now one of the biggest co-operatives in Catalonia, the area it operates in, and there are basically two types of member: consumer members and working members.

Consumer members, mostly people holding medical insurance policies with Assistència Sanitària Col·legial, contribute 5,000 pesetas to the share capital (reimbursable when they decide they no longer want to be members), 2,000 pesetas as a one-off non-

reimbursable joining fee, and a quarterly fee of 1,500 to cover the co-operative's expenses. That gives them the right to take part in the co-operative's governing bodies, to be able to vote at general assemblies and to take part in social activities that the co-operative organises.

Anyone insured with Assistència has the right to choose his or her physician freely, to receive customised treatment, to have a single room and to be hospitalised in Hospital de Barcelona whenever he or she requires it. If he or she is also a member of SCIAS, he or she will benefit from a series of advantages while in hospital which, in some ways, is his or her home.

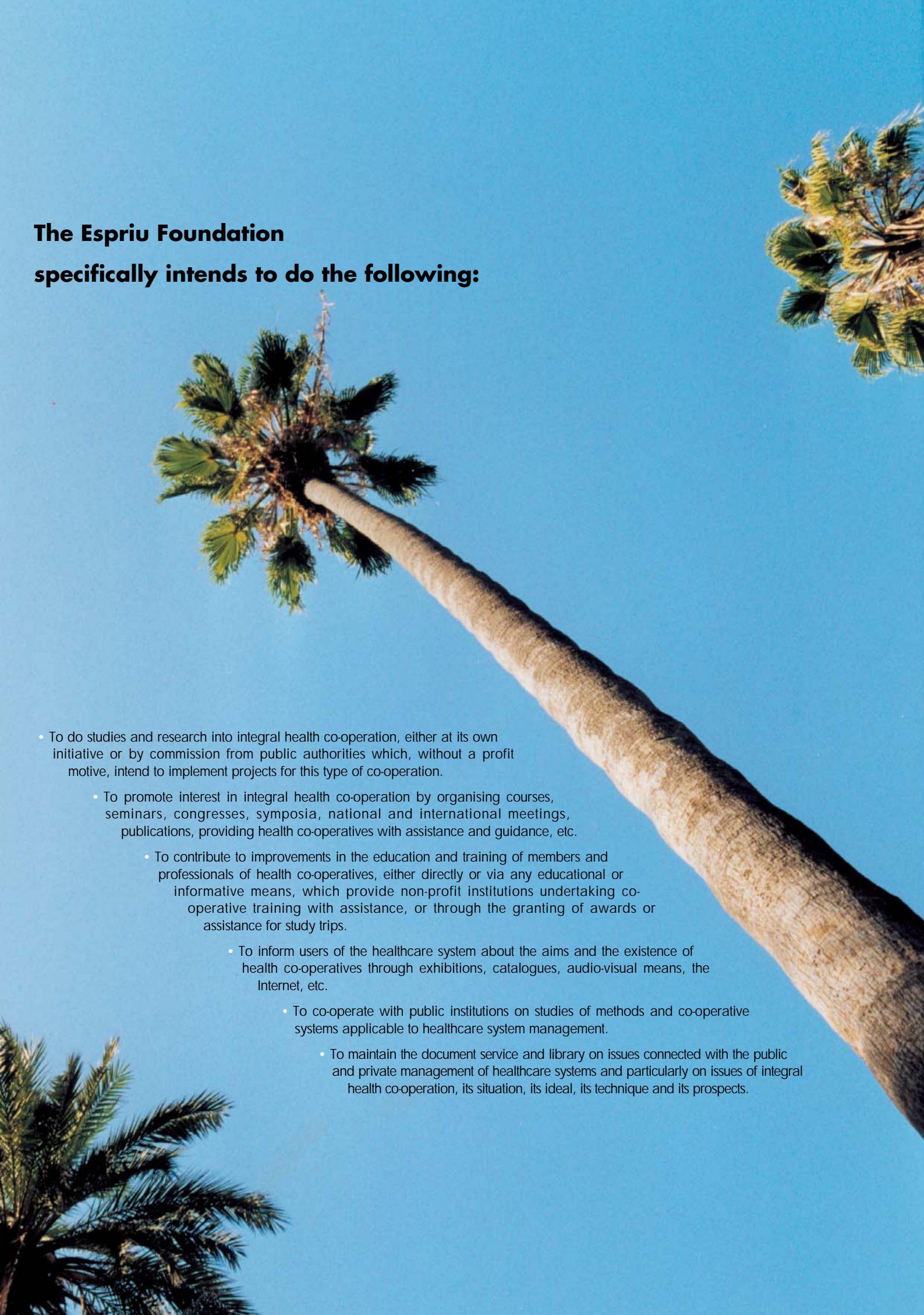
To ensure that this magnificent hospital is able to operate, it needs a lot of people. SCIAS's co-operative spirit did not tolerate having salaried workers disconnected from co-operative operation very well. So getting its workers to become members of the co-operative too immediately became a priority. Now there are over 700 members who are workers.

### **El Hospital de Barcelona**

Hospital de Barcelona, located at number 660 on the Avenida Diagonal, an excellent area of Barcelona, occupies a plot of land covering 5,034m<sup>2</sup>. It has 19 floors above ground and three floors below ground. The total surface area is 44,000m<sup>2</sup>.

It has a total of 370 rooms, all single, and a high degree of comfort. (It should not be forgotten that this building was originally going to be the Hilton Hotel until SCIAS bought it). To get an idea of the number of patients that the hospital can deal with, below you will find some data for the year 2000, which appear in the co-operative's well presented report: 24,048 in-patients and 4,004 out-patients. 13,401 patients had operations, of whom 4,250 - 33.7% - were included in the outpatient surgery or short-stay programme. The number of births was 2,075. The casualty service made 45,527 visits and the SUD (emergency home care service) made 68,849. In total, we can assert that the various services of Hospital de Barcelona dealt with 130,000 cases in the year 2000.

Hospital de Barcelona and its atypical co-operative organisation arouse a great deal of curiosity all over the world, and it is not surprising to find that there is a constant stream of representatives of physicians, medical associations, universities and public authorities interested in getting close-up knowledge of this reality. Over 100 visitors were received in the year 2000 alone, some of whom came from Portugal, Great Britain, Sweden, Finland, the United States, Brazil, Argentina, France and Switzerland. **F**



**The Espriu Foundation  
specifically intends to do the following:**

- To do studies and research into integral health co-operation, either at its own initiative or by commission from public authorities which, without a profit motive, intend to implement projects for this type of co-operation.
  - To promote interest in integral health co-operation by organising courses, seminars, congresses, symposia, national and international meetings, publications, providing health co-operatives with assistance and guidance, etc.
    - To contribute to improvements in the education and training of members and professionals of health co-operatives, either directly or via any educational or informative means, which provide non-profit institutions undertaking co-operative training with assistance, or through the granting of awards or assistance for study trips.
      - To inform users of the healthcare system about the aims and the existence of health co-operatives through exhibitions, catalogues, audio-visual means, the Internet, etc.
        - To co-operate with public institutions on studies of methods and co-operative systems applicable to healthcare system management.
          - To maintain the document service and library on issues connected with the public and private management of healthcare systems and particularly on issues of integral health co-operation, its situation, its ideal, its technique and its prospects.