A few months ago, I received an invitation by Pedro Ivan Navarro MD to write an editorial for the Journal of the Colombian Society of Ophthalmology, which he heads nowadays. He suggested me to relate my professional trajectory as a foreigner ophthalmologist in Spain and share with my colleagues how has been this professional facet of my life as a colombian physician, in an apparently difficult country to practice such as Spain, and have had obtained professional acknowledgement.

My trajectory as an anterior segment ophthalmologist has been closely related to two of the most important advances in Ophthalmology: extracapsular cataract surgery and LASIK refractive surgery. My medical vocation started at the walled Cartagena de Indias city where I was born and due to my somehow adventurous personality I wanted to study abroad, a desire I shared with my father who insisted me that I must study in Colombia and only afterwards, do a specialization abroad. Upon my insistence he then suggested two countries he liked for several reasons: Spain and Argentina. I chose Spain and that’s how I arrived to this country.
My original plan was to study and go back to my country and with my family, where I had had a happy life. But, as I later learned “Destiny of men is known only by God” and “A man knows where he was born but not where he will die”.

I studied medicine at Universidad de Zaragoza and did my Ophthalmology residency training at Hospital Valle de Hebrón in Barcelona. On 1974, I got a scholarship from Ramon Castroviejo MD to perform an anterior segment fellowship at his New York clinic. There, I had the opportunity to see his great advances in Ophthalmology regarding corneal transplants, fly in chopper with Charles Kelman MD to different hospitals to see the very early phacoemulsification techniques (discouraging at the beginning, indeed), get in touch with the surgical microscope, pass through the Retina Foundation at Boston (where I met Alvaro Rodriguez MD, who was working there at that time) and visit other leading centers in Ophthalmology such as The Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. I also had the opportunity to attend my first American Academy of Ophthalmology meeting.

One of the most important things I realized on that time, was the importance to study and read english-written scientific journals in order to be properly updated, trying to avoid old books because everything was changing so fast. Upon returning to Spain and being assistant professor of Ophthalmology at Hospital Valle de Hebrón in Barcelona, I began to work on penetrating keratoplasty and extracapsular cataract extraction simultaneously. For years my life transpired between work at the hospital and study at home. I recovered old medical records of patients at Hospital Valle de Hebrón waiting for a corneal transplant, I founded the eye bank and it became the second hospital in Spain regarding keratoplasties, behind Clinica Barraquer in Barcelona.

During the 80’s, a few surgeons and me were performing cataract surgery and implanting intraocular lenses in Spain. I still remember the critical comments on the aisles regarding the “Hoyos’s human experiments”. Extracapsular cataract surgery gave me recognition and a status among spanish Ophthalmology even thought I had no mentors in this country.

Between 1984 and 1986, I organized and teach the “Intensive Courses of Extracapsular Surgery and Artificial Lens” at Ciudad Sanitaria Valle de Hebrón in Barcelona, where ophthalmologists from all around Spain were present including some chiefs of Ophthalmology services, who were beginning to perform this technique. Teaching became a very important part of my life as clinical chief at the cornea and anterior segment surgery division at Hospital Valle de Hebrón Ophthalmology Service. In 1985, I was invited by Eduardo Arenas MD to participate at the “Third Course of Extracapsular Cataract Surgery and Intraocular Lens Implantation” at Centro Medico de Los Andes - Fundacion Santa Fe de Bogotá, where live surgery was performed. At that time, I had the chance to perform the first extracapsular cataract surgery with intraocular lens implantation in Cartagena de Indias, something that has always fulfilled me with pride and satisfaction. I hereby attach a picture of that special moment and take advantage of this media to formalize it on the annals of Cartagena’s medical history.

On those years radial keratotomy was beginning worldwide marking the startup of a new field of Ophthalmology, the refractive surgery. By 1985, I traveled again to the United States to do a radial keratotomy fellowship with
Dennis Shepard MD in Santa María, California. By then, I was a cornea academic specialist and there I saw patients with 16 and 32 corneal incisions, which made me wait up to one year to start doing this technique. I also traveled to Cleveland and did my epikeratoplasty training with Professor Kaufman and Marguerite McDonald MD, a technique I performed for several years with good results in myopia and poor results in hyperopia. Nowadays I still see some patients in whom I did a myopic epikeratoplasty for high myopia who are still happy with their wide optical zones. By 1986, I requested to be voluntarily dismissed from the hospital in order to concentrate fully on my clinic, Instituto Oftalmológico Hoyos, where I did all my refractive surgery trajectory.

By those years, a series of modifications were being done on Professor Jose Ignacio Barraquer’s keratomileusis technique in order to avoid freezing and simplify the technique. I was going to buy the BKS (Barraquer, Krumeich, Swiner) when Luis Antonio Ruiz MD began his first “in situ” keratomileusis in 1987 at Clínica Barraquer, Bogotá. In 1988, I bought one of the first Ruiz’s microkeratomes which was manual and did experimental surgery for over a year on pig eyes before doing it in humans.

In 1989, I organized the “Theoric and Practical Refractive Surgery Course: In situ Keratomileusis” at Clínica del Remedio in Barcelona with Luis Ruiz MD as invited speaker, where we did the first patients. On 1992, I compiled my “in situ” cases for my doctoral thesis “In situ Keratomileusis for High Myopia” getting a Doctor Cum Laude degree. I remember I sent a copy of my thesis to Professor Jose Ignacio Barraquer as a token of admiration and respect for his work on these techniques.

In 1993, I performed the first LASIK (Laser In Situ Keratomileusis) treatment ever done in Spain using the Summit Laser and presented the results at Sociedad Catalana de Oftalmologia Meeting, that same year. Talking to Enrique Ariza MD during a meeting in Puebla (Mexico) where I was presenting my in situ KM cases, we decided to create the “Keratomileusis Study Group” which ended up having its first International Meeting in Cartagena de Indias in 1994 at same time with the Colombian Society of Ophthalmology Meeting, under Eduardo Arenas MD’s backing. From the very beginning we counted with Professor Jose Ignacio Barraquer’s support who was KMSG’s honorary President and who accompanied us and participated in all our activities until his death. With the KMSG, international acknowledgment arrived, organizing With the KMSG, international acknowledgment arrived, organizing first LASIK courses in United States, “United States LASIK course & Wet Lab”, under support of James Rowsey MD.

In my career I’ve had the opportunity to live closely the great evolution that eye surgery has had during the last years. If there is something I could recommend to new generations of colleagues in order to be successful, I would suggest study dedication, scientific curiosity, continuous surgical training and a great passion for Ophthalmology. All factors are fundamental elements to be a good independent professional in any country you work.

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