

Brief commentary about the origin of the anterolateral thoracotomy for the surgical treatment of cardiac wounds

Breve comentario sobre el origen de la toracotomía anterolateral para el tratamiento quirúrgico de las heridas cardíacas

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To the Editor,

We have read with great interest the article written by Velázquez-Santiago et al.¹ on the surgical treatment of penetrating cardiac injuries, and we would like to share some thoughts on the naming of the incision used.

Apparently, in 1926, Claude Beck noted that Spangaro had used the left anterolateral thoracotomy for the first time as an emergency approach to treat cardiac wounds back in 1906. For almost a century, this incision has been named after Spangaro, thus attributing this Italian surgeon an authorship that may not be entitled to².

According to the small biography available, Saverio Spangaro (February 29, 1870 - December 12, 1946) was a talented, brilliant, meticulous, and daring surgeon. He ventured into gynecological and GI surgery and published on topics related to bacteriology, anatomopathology, and experimental pathology. However, interestingly enough, no experience has been attributed to him regarding general or thoracic surgery, despite supposedly making contributions in that field for which he is currently remembered. There is no scientific evidence either to suggest that he ever operated on a human heart. His 1907 article titled “Experimental research on the functional behavior of the

wounded heart subject to surgical procedures” supposedly described the thoracotomy discussed above, focusing on “the cardiac condition of the thorax and of the dog in cardiac injuries and surgeries [where] opening the heart through the fifth intercostal space was the preferred access”³.

On the other hand, in a compilation on sutured cardiac wounds up to 1909, reference is made to Spangaro’s experimental work. However, he is not identified as the author of any of the operations studied⁴. But, experimental medical practice does not set any milestones in surgical history. Therefore, besides being unfair to credit Spangaro as the creator of the left anterolateral thoracotomy in the fifth intercostal space, this also indicates a sort of superficial historical research, as Daniel Hale Williams had already used that approach in his famous cardiac surgery performed in July 10, 1893^{2,5}.

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Patients' data protection. The authors declare that no patient data appear in this article.

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