Flavio Aloe, MD: A tribute for a deceased sleep medicine leader in Brazil

The recent, untimely death of Flavio Aloe, MD, a shining light and vital force in Brazilian Sleep Medicine, is an occasion for experiencing gratitude and appreciation besides shock and sadness. I first met Flavio on June 11, 1997 in San Francisco, California. I had just finished giving a lecture on “Epic Dream Disorder” (relentless nocturnal dreaming with non-restorative sleep) during the annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies (APSS). After my talk, Flavio came up to me and extended an invitation on behalf of the Brazilian Neurological Society. I was asked to lecture on RBD, the Differential Diagnosis of Sleep-related Injury, and Recent Discoveries in the Parasomnias of Interest to Neurologists, at the XVIII Congress of the Brazilian Neurological Society in São Paulo during August 1998. I gladly accepted Flavio’s offer, and soon befriended a unique person who was passionate about sleep medicine and who was fully committed to further developing this new field in Brazil.

Over the course of nearly 14 years, Flavio and I had frequent communications about new findings in sleep medicine and how they could be disseminated in Brazilian educational forums. Flavio and I served as Co-Chairs for the symposium “Update on RBD,” presented at the 3rd International Congress on Sleep Medicine, WASM (World Associa-

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tion of Sleep Medicine), and 12th Brazilian Congress on Sleep Medicine, in São Paulo, on November 10, 2009. Flavio was also one of the speakers at that symposium, and delivered one of his characteristically thorough well-researched talks. (Flavio was always well-prepared for any sleep medicine-related activity as anyone who knew him was fully aware of). Flavio, his close friend and colleague, Geraldo Rizzo, MD, and I attended the cutting-edge conference, 6th International Symposium on Narcolepsy, in Monte Verita, Ascona, Ticino, Switzerland, at the end of September 2009. This conference was organized by Claudio Bassetti, MD, from Lugano, Switzerland, who last year was a distinguished invited speaker in Rio, with Flavio playing an instrumental role in that process.

Flavio and I coauthored two book chapters on violent sleep disorders, and on nocturnal eating disorders linked to the sleep-wake cycle.

Also, in our sleep center’s review on sleep and sex, we mentioned the important and fascinating case report by Flavio Aloe and colleagues on sexsomnia being linked with multiple parasomnias. This was one of the earliest reported links on how sexsomnia is frequently embedded in a rich history of multiple parasomnias (or else with obstructive sleep apnea as the second most common scenario), rather than as an isolated parasomnia. This early observation, reinforced by subsequent publications, carries important medical-legal consequences.

After I gave Flavio an inscribed copy of my first book, “Paradox lost: Midnight in the battleground of sleep and dreams”, he asked me if I could provide him with an additional copy of my book — to give to his 90-year-old father, who was still a very intellectually engaged and curious man. Clearly, for Flavio and his father, “the apple does not fall far from the tree”. Moreover, Flavio was very active in promoting my book with a literary agent in Rio, for the purpose of finding a Portuguese language publisher. Over several years, we nearly found a publisher, and to date the process continues, thanks to Flavio’s persistence. This example shows how selfless Flavio was — always giving of himself to people interested in sleep medicine, and not asking for much or anything in return.

Here is another recent example: Flavio connected me with the noted Brazilian neurologist and movement disorders specialist, Alan Eckeli, MD, about collaborating in writing a paper on two cases of Sleep Related Eating Disorder associated with Parkinson’s Disease — an association not previously reported. Flavio did not request being a coauthor; he just brought interested parties together for the good of the field of sleep medicine and of neurology. That paper was recently accepted for peer-reviewed journal publication.

For almost 15 years, Flavio and I organized the annual Sunday evening “Brazil dinner” during the June APSS meetings. (Although Flavio trained in sleep medicine in New York with Michael Thorpy, MD, our center was fortunate to have trained Brazilians Marcia Assis, MD, and Rosana Alves, MD, as former excellent sleep medicine fellows). The Figure shows a photo of us from one of those dinners.

Flavio left an impressive legacy, as the Brazilian sleep and neurology communities know so well. He and Stella Tavares, MD, ran an excellent sleep medicine fellowship program at the University of São Paulo, and Flavio was proud to say that he reviewed each page of each polysomnogram with his fellows, leaving no “sleep stone unturned” for careful scrutiny. Flavio was a solid gold person, devoted father to Piero and a special colleague and friend to many people. I feel blessed for many reasons to have been friend and colleague of Flavio Aloe, and so my wife Andrea, and I wish to honor his memory and legacy in the field of sleep medicine in Brazil by establishing this year the Flavio Aloe Award for the best abstract and poster at the annual meeting of the Brazilian Sleep Society in Belo Horizonte in November 2011. We will always miss you, Flavio, and your banner will be carried high and with your dedicated spirit by the Brazilian sleep medicine community for generations into the future.
REFERENCES