

J. Leonel Villavicencio, MD (1926-2019)



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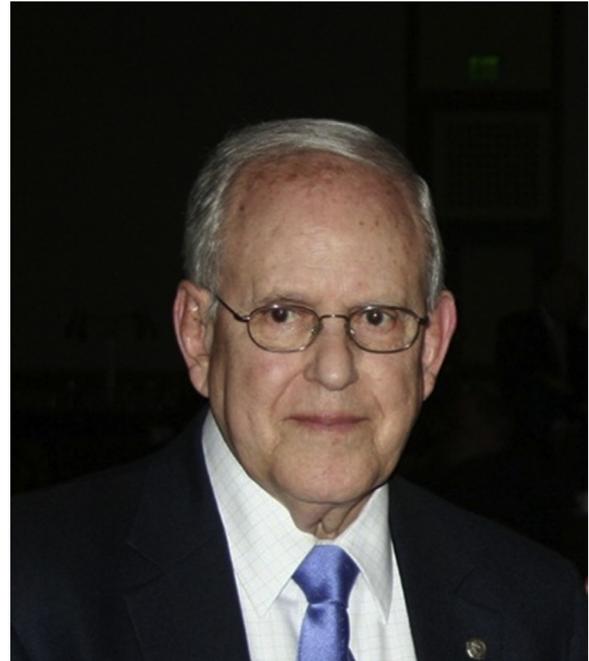
Dr J. Leonel Villavicencio was one of the first vascular surgeons who advocated equal attention to all components of the circulation—arterial, venous, and lymphatic. Yet, the “Mexican Maestro” was careful not to criticize those who focused only on arterial diseases, even though he thought that an understanding of the interaction between arterial, venous, and lymphatic systems was a key to the care of patients.

Dr Villavicencio was born in Mexico City in 1926, the eldest of six children. Orphaned at age 14, he still obtained an excellent university education and graduated summa cum laude from medical school in 1952. After a general surgery residency at the Hospital Central Militar in Mexico City, he served as a military medical officer, and in 1956, made a pivotal decision to move to the United States.

In the United States, he completed research fellowships with famous surgeons, including Warren Cole, Geza de Takats, Francis Moore, Richard Warren, and Robert Gross. He studied mast cells, fibrinolytic agents, and a new pump oxygenator. He also was trained in heart surgery and, in 1957, he and Dr Richard Warren designed an instrument to measure lymphatic pressure and perform lymphangiography. During this time in the United States, he met and married Suzie Bell, an intensive care nurse.

Although Dr Villavicencio’s early career focused on research, after 6 years in the United States he returned to Mexico in 1962 to fulfil his military commitment, and he became the rare cardiovascular surgeon who balanced an interest in cardiac surgery with a knowledge of arterial, venous, and lymphatic diseases. He became the chair of surgery at an army hospital and Vice Chair of Surgery at the Children’s Hospital Medical Center in Mexico City.

In 1982, Dr Villavicencio was invited by Dr Norman Rich to return to the United States, where he became a



Distinguished Professor of Surgery at the Uniformed Services School of Medicine. He started the first venous and lymphatic clinic at Walter Reed Army Hospital and the Bethesda Naval Medical Center and was instrumental in getting polidocanol approved as a sclerosant in the United States. His textbook chapters on sclerotherapy became the gold standard for many venous specialists.

Leonel Villavicencio received many awards, including honorary membership in the Society for Vascular Surgery, the Founders Award of the American Venous Forum, and the Max Ratschow Gold Medal of the International Angiology Curatorium. He also served as President of the Mexican Society of Angiology and Vascular Surgery.

In one of his more than 350 publications, “What my teachers did not teach me,” Dr Villavicencio identified three important skills: (1) how to deal with colleagues, (2) how to deal with patients, and (3) maintaining your relationship with your family. And, when asked to give advice to young surgeons, he said, “Nothing can be more important for a surgeon than good training—the best you can possibly get.”

Leonel Villavicencio died on January 14, 2019.

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