

# An old barrier is breaking down: Cuba and the United States of America attempt to renew relations. What will be its impact on anesthesiology and related sciences?

## Editorial

Science and politics should not be considered distant activities as both have been crucial in mankind progress since man realized that it was necessary to link actions in order to evolve the way of thinking of societies and their engagement, regardless of their basic differences. One of the inalienable characteristics of human being is to be political, which under the current globalized conditions allows us to share dilemmas of all kinds around the earth; every day we are joyful of living in progress, we are aware as well of the food shortage of impoverished, the anguish of helpless sadness of those who will die, the fortune of the millionaire, the frustration in the midst of a war, the fame of whom has achieved success, and many other things we acknowledge as we have access to the latest advances in science. In the scientific ambience, some colleagues have been forced to share the rejection of several medical communities, geopolitical elimination dictated by irrational leaders, and nationalist personalities who fail to grasp that knowledge has to be universal.<sup>1</sup>

After World War II, Germany was divided in two by the Berlin Wall; a physical barrier that was a determining factor in the progress of the human race, which lasted from 1949 to 1997. Fortunately, this wall was demolished allowing free transit of people, ideas, products, and scientific advances. Recently two news have impacted the current political and scientific world; on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014 the world was congratulated with the official information released simultaneously by the Cuban government and the U.S.A. government: both countries planned to restore diplomatic relations after 55 years of embargo; an historical deadlock between both countries. On April the 11<sup>th</sup> 2015, during the Summit of the Americas in Panama, Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama met face to face to achieve this goal.

Is there any similarity between the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the U.S.A. blockade to Cuba? Doubtlessly, there are some similar geopolitical situations: the first mainly affected the European region, most notably in Germany but had far reached global implications. The second geopolitical situation certainly will mediate positive results in the entire American continent, with greater impact on the Caribbean island and major changes throughout the scientific world.

Since the first ether anesthesia performed in Latin America in La Habana by the Cuban doctor Vicente Antonio De Castro y Bermúdez in March 11<sup>th</sup> 1847, Cuban anesthesia was influenced by the French and chloroform was the anesthetic of choice until 1916.<sup>2-4</sup> Pio Manuel Martínez Curbelo was another Cuban anesthesiologist who in 1937 contributed with his innovative regional anesthesia techniques describing for the first time a novel supraclavicular approach to block the brachial plexus with the patient sitting in a chair. Later, in 1947 he published the continuous epidural block.<sup>5-7</sup> There has also

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**Victor M Whizar-Lugo**

Intensive Care Unit, Hospital General de Tijuana, México

**Correspondence:** Victor M. Whizar-Lugo, Intensive Care Unit, Hospital General de Tijuana, ISESALUD, Av. Centenario 10851, Zona Rio, Tijuana B.C, México, Tel +52-664-6848905, Fax +52-664-6848906, Email [vwhizar@anestesia-dolor.org](mailto:vwhizar@anestesia-dolor.org)

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been data recollection which suggests that Ernesto Che Guevara, an Argentine doctor who partly was formed in the Hospital General de Mexico and later participated in the Cuban Revolution, acted as anesthesiologist-surgeon in the mountains of Sierra Maestra during the Cuban Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

Since those historical times, there is much progress that has happened in Cuban medicine. They have distinguished themselves in neurosciences, oncology, cardiology, tropical medicine, disaster medicine, immunology, epidemiology, and infectious diseases. The training of human resources for health care in Cuba has developed exponentially, reaching health population coverage of one doctor for every 148 Cubans. They have 24 medical schools, 161 hospitals and 452 clinics that provide free care. The “Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina” receives students from 116 countries of Latin America, Africa, Asia, Oceania and the U.S.A. Cuban medicine has an intense activity in humanitarian missions in disaster areas like the latest in West Africa during the Ebola outbreak and the earthquake in Nepal.

In anesthesiology they have been remarkable in neuroanesthesia, cardiac anesthesia, total intravenous techniques, and neuromuscular blocking agents as well, although some Cubans anesthesiologists consider necessary an implementation of a continuous improvement system of quality in anesthesiology's services to meet the expectancies of their patients.<sup>9</sup> Although Cuba has around 74 biomedical journals, only some of them are included in databases like Scopus, WoS Core Collection, SciELO Citation Index, or PubMed.<sup>10,11</sup> After several failed efforts done in the mid-70s, the Revista Cubana de Anestesiología y Reanimación has been published regularly on the internet since October-December 2002 and is now listed on WoS, SciELO Citation Index, Latindex, Infomed, and Biblioteca Virtual de Salud en Cuba.<sup>10</sup> This journal has free open access and welcomes articles from anesthesiologists and related colleagues from many countries. Since its appearance on the WEB, Revista Cubana de Anestesiología y Reanimación under the editorial leadership of Idoris Cordero Escobar MD, has published 371 articles (Editorials,

clinical research, case reports, reviews, and letters), of which 23 were written by clinician outside of Cuba. This journal, like many other biomedical journals around the world, has the characteristics described by the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) to be a “Small Journal”.<sup>12</sup> The first CUBA-USA anesthesia symposium was held in Habana in 1999, with an excellent acceptance.<sup>13</sup> Since then there have been successful approaches among professionals from both countries interested in sharing their experiences and knowledge. Trade liberalization with the U.S.A. must take better availability of drugs and biomedical equipment to result in even more research advances in anesthesiology and related disciplines, which will result in better care. Also improved communication through the internet will facilitate the dissemination of biomedical advances and free continuing medical education.

Even though *Anesthesia and Critical Care Open Access Journal* has a scientific mission, we can't be indifferent to this important geopolitical change that once finished, will certainly bring great scientific benefits that will positively impact the health of millions of people, especially to the individuals living in the American continent, from Greenland to the Patagonia. The international scientific community sees and hopes for a beneficial end in this old geopolitical conflict.

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## Conflicts of interest

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