

## PROSTHETICS PROGRAM IN ARGENTINA

In November 1963, the Chief of the VA Prosthetics Center, Mr. Anthony Staros, visited Argentina at the request of Dr. Luis Alberto Gonzalez, President, Comision Nacional de Rehabilitacion del Lisiado, Buenos Aires.<sup>1</sup> The trip was sponsored by the Comision Nacional (the National Commission), the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Veterans Administration. Mr. Staros was invited to present a series of lectures on prosthetics and orthotics and to make recommendations to the Argentine sponsors after a study of their program and practices.

From his 2-week on-site study, Mr. Staros concluded that the three most pressing needs for the development of modern prosthetics and orthotics in Argentina were: (1) coordinated and simultaneous programs in education and practical training; (2) the dissemination of prosthetics information; and (3) availability of modern prefabricated components at prices and in currencies which the average South American practitioner, disabled person, or supporting institution can afford.

During his first week in Argentina, Mr. Staros presented seven 2-hour lectures on biomechanics and the principles underlying modern prosthetics-orthotics methods and also gave demonstrations of modern practices. His lectures were given as part of the National Commission's Second Course (Theoretical and Practical) in Prosthetics and Orthotics. During the second week, Mr. Staros visited prosthetics centers in Buenos Aires and San Juan and discussed methods of improving their programs and practices.

The series of prosthetics and orthotics courses initiated by the National Commission in Buenos Aires seemed to be extremely effective, and the Institute for Rehabilitation in that city has facility and staff for more such programs if given sufficient time and support. Dr. Jose B. Cibeira, the director of the institute, is a research-oriented physiatrist with certification by the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in the United States. Dr. Juan Luis Govi, Chief of the Amputee Service of the Institute, is an orthopedic

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier in 1963 Mr. Staros had served in Denmark as General Rapporteur at the International Experts Meeting on Prosthetics, organized by the World Veterans Federation in cooperation with the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled and its Committee on Protheses, Braces, and Technical Aids (report of this meeting has just been published by the World Veterans Federation). Mr. Staros is also Chairman of the International Society's U.S. Committee's Subcommittee on International Orthotics and Prosthetics.

surgeon who is also a very effective administrator and manager. He received U.S. training in prosthetics and orthotics and is also familiar with Western European practices. To introduce improvements learned in the United States and Europe, Dr. Govi spent much time teaching and doing fabrication work in the Buenos Aires prosthetics shop. A member of the International Committee on Protheses, Braces, and Technical Aids of the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled, Dr. Govi has volunteered to translate considerable English technical literature into Spanish. Such a service will benefit the entire Spanish-speaking world. Indeed, both Dr. Cibeira and Dr. Govi wish to serve in promoting improved prosthetics and orthotics programs that will benefit all of Latin America as well as Argentina.

In the western part of Argentina, Dr. Ramon Penafort, Chief of the Orthopedic Department, Hospital Rawson, has been most active in trying to improve prosthetics practices in the Province of San Juan. This surgeon spends much of his free time in the prosthetics workshop trying personally to lead his technicians to improved techniques. Dr. Penafort's improvisations were excellent, but it was obvious that he needed funds for buying components.

Although modern principles of fitting and alignment are being taught in the courses conducted in Buenos Aires, the major weakness in the Argentine program is the lack of prefabricated components. The U.S. Manufacturing Co. in Glendale, California, producer of prefabricated prosthetic and orthotic components in the United States, has been deeply concerned about the lack of progress in the distribution of components in South America. During his stay in Buenos Aires, the President of U.S. Manufacturing Co., Mr. J. M. Greene, initiated arrangements for distribution through a new company, to be called the United States Manufacturing Argentina. Although the company will be owned principally by Argentines, Mr. Greene will participate financially and technically. Parts and components from the Glendale plant will, at first, be sent to Buenos Aires to be sold to practitioners throughout Latin America. Proceeds from such sales, which will be in Latin American currency, will then be reinvested in Argentina to set up manufacturing facilities in Buenos Aires. It is hoped that besides producing parts for Argentina, the new facilities will be able to supply parts for their associated company in the United States.

It was noted by Mr. Staros that a broad and versatile industrial base was being developed in the Argentine economy. The machine tool industry and its products appeared to be the equal of any in the world, and modern practices in the use of plastic resins are currently being adopted.

As a result of his observations in Argentina, Mr. Staros made five significant recommendations. He recommended that:

1. The U.S. research program develop close ties with the Cibeira-Govi team to bring about improvements in prosthetic practices and appliances in the Argentine Republic.

2. The National Commission support the 9-week prosthetic-orthotic courses now under Dr. Govi's direction, as well as long-term courses to train new technicians.

3. A regional subcommittee of the International Society's International Committee on Prostheses, Braces, and Technical Aids be organized in Latin America to coordinate plans for improved prosthetics-orthotics practices throughout those countries.

4. Dr. J. L. Govi be solicited for his leadership in forming such a subcommittee and that he seek the collaboration and support of both Dr. Robin Hindley-Smith and Mr. Erik Jensen of the World Health Organization in these efforts.

5. Argentine persons be used for their own training needs wherever possible and other nations of Latin America participate directly in the Argentine training programs.

It is Mr. Staros' conviction that given economic support and the assistance of the U.S. Manufacturing Co., a program under the leadership of such dedicated men as Drs. L. A. Gonzalez, J. B. Cibeira, J. L. Govi, Carlos Ottolenghi (Vice President of the Comision and Professor of Orthopedic Surgery, University of Buenos Aires), and Dr. R. Penafort would lead to major improvements in the practice of prosthetics and orthotics not only in the Argentine Republic but also in every nation of Latin America.