

# Hispanic Heritage Month: Luis R. Soltero Harrington, MD

## Luis R. Soltero Harrington, MD, 1925-2014

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Luis Rubén Soltero Harrington was born on September 4, 1925, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Augusto Soltero, who owned a ranch and an insurance company, and Ana Harrington, whose father was from Boston, Massachusetts. He received a degree in agronomy from the Colegio de Agricultura y Artes Mecánicas de Mayagüez, where he was a member of Phi Delta Gamma, the first Puerto Rican Greek fraternal organization. He received a scholarship to study at Northwestern University Medical School and earned his MD in 1951 after an internship at Michael Reese Hospital. *Image at right: Soltero Harrington from Galenus 68, no. 1 (año 11): 56.*



Soltero Harrington returned to Puerto Rico, where he worked as a surgeon at the Hospital de Distrito de Aguadilla. He then joined the United States Army and was stationed in Texas. After completing his military service, he stayed in Texas and became a resident in cardiovascular surgery at the Baylor College of Medicine with world-renowned heart surgeon Michael DeBakey, MD. During this time, he also worked with Denton Cooley, MD, another prominent heart surgeon, at the Texas Heart Institute, within the Texas Children's Hospital and St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital in Houston. According to his obituary in a Puerto Rican medical journal, Soltero Harrington distinguished himself during his five years in Houston and participated in thousands of cardiac operations. It was during this time that he also met Joyce Carpenter, an anesthetist from Canada who operated the heart pump for DeBakey during his surgeries. Soltero Harrington and Carpenter were married in 1958.

In 1959, Soltero Harrington returned to Puerto Rico with his wife and was soon named chief of cardiovascular surgery at both San Juan City Hospital and its School of Medicine. He was the first certified pediatric cardiac surgeon in Puerto Rico and thus the first to perform cardiac surgery on infants on the island. In a lecture about the history of cardiovascular surgery in Puerto Rico, José Torres-Gómez, MD, noted that Soltero Harrington's surgical career was well known for its low mortality rate. Joyce Soltero Harrington was also a medical pioneer in Puerto Rico. She put her experience with heart pumps to use and revived a program of extracorporeal circulation which had been discontinued because of poor results, beginning a new era of cardiovascular surgery in Puerto Rico.

Soltero Harrington continued to distinguish himself throughout his career. In 1960 he introduced a technique of pulmonary artery banding to alleviate heart failure so that infants could be operated on with less risk. Three years later he became the first surgeon in Puerto Rico to implant an artificial mitral valve in a child; he performed a similar operation on an adult later that year. That same year he also joined the staff of Hospital El Maestro, a hospital that had been started by the Puerto Rico Teachers Association in 1959, where he did many types of surgery, particularly cardiovascular, thoracic, and oncological. He also put his expertise to use in the 1980s when organizing a group of specialists to work at the Regional Hospital in Bayamón as part of an effort to reform healthcare and help staff regional hospitals in Puerto Rico.

Luis Soltero Harrington died in 2014 and left a legacy, in his own family and beyond. A niece and nephew of his work as surgeons in Puerto Rico, and he trained many other prominent Puerto Rican surgeons throughout his career. As Norman Maldonado, MD, stated in Soltero Harrington's obituary: "El Dr. Luis Soltero Harrington ha sido uno de los más grandes médicos que ha tenido Puerto Rico... Sus hazañas deben ser recordadas" (Dr. Luis Soltero Harrington has been one of the greatest doctors that Puerto Rico has had...his achievements must be remembered).

## Selected References

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Torres-Gomez, Jose M. "The History of Cardiovascular Surgery in Puerto Rico." *Puerto Rico Health Sciences Journal* 18, no. 2 (June 1999): 123-127.

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