

# Not Born Yesterday: Anti-Cancer Activism in Early 20th Century Latin America

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A Bullitt History of Medicine Club Lecture  
September 15, 2020

# Questions

- The BIG one: to what extent have we moved past older institutions, attitudes, and technologies that used to define our approach to such a deadly disease?
- Dr. Juan José Mostajo: how to enroll a broad coalition in campaigns to broadcast the early signs of cancer? The Anti-Cancer League (LAC)!!
- Why was the LAC sidelined, weakened, and dismissed?



Constantino T. Carvallo (1853-1920), Professor of  
Gynecology at San Marcos University School of  
Medicine, 1895-1920

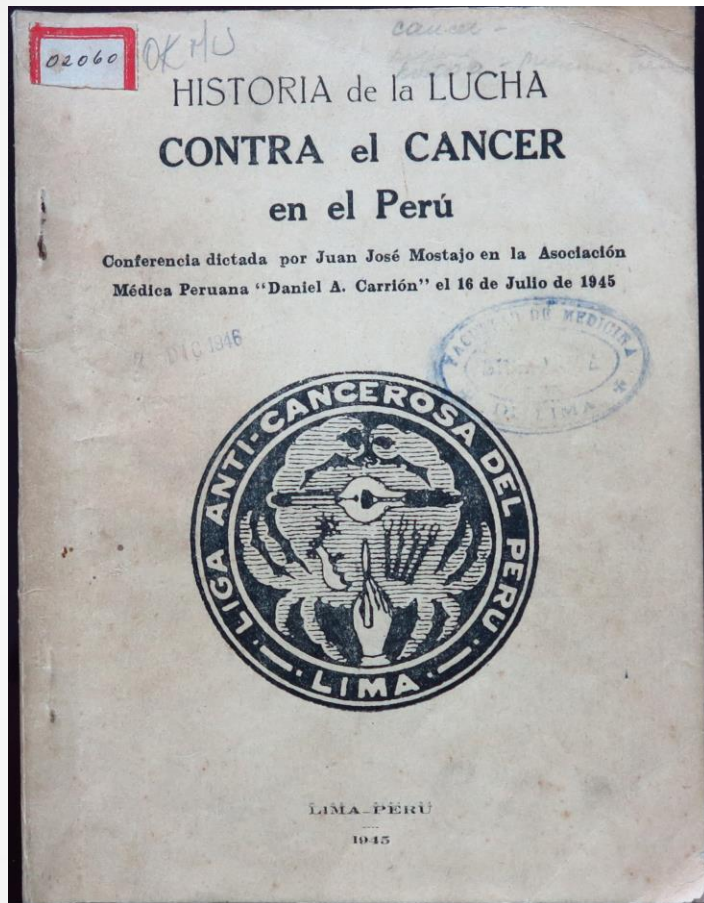


# Morbidity and mortality by selected illnesses, 1913-1930. Source: Sociedad de Beneficencia de Lima

Year	Morb- mort malaria	Lung tb/ respiratory illness	Syphilis	Pneumonia	Diarrhea/ enteritis >2	Cancer (all)	Cancer- women's sexual organs
1913 - 1930	34,879	19,613	6,852	5,300	3,299	4,169	1,871

# Dr. Juan José Mostajo and the Peruvian Surgery Society's Permanent Commission on Cancer Control

- Goal: “to awaken the sanitary awareness of individuals.”
- Appeals to general practitioners, midwives, lay people.
  - To fellow physicians: deny cancer patients any drugs, including palliative ones; direct them to seek surgical or gynecological attention
  - To midwives: Gynecology “is a medical science completely unknown to you, one in which you may not dabble without causing harm and usurping [another expert's jurisdiction].”
  - To all: Caught and surgically excised early, cancer could be cured.
- Pres. Augusto B. Leguía names Mostajo “initiator of the campaign against cancer in Peru.”



- Anti-Cancer League founded in 1924, officially recognized 1926.
- Defeat cancer “with the strong support of public opinion and well-run sanitary efforts.”
- Initiatives:
  - Outpt cancer clinics
  - Go beyond Lima
  - “Cancer week”
  - Cancer postage stamp
  - Library
  - Statistics
  - Visiting social workers
  - Public outreach
  - Specialized cancer care center

# What happened?

- Duplication of cancer-related activities by Leguía
- San Marcos U. School of Medicine overlooks public outreach
  - Coordination/resource-sharing between specialists in hospitals
- The rise of radiology, esp. radium therapy, and greater competition with surgery
  - Curie Foundation's Claudius Regaud: "radiologists are not enemies of surgery," but no mention of cooperation with LAC and its non-hospital-based mission

# Finally! National Cancer Institute

- Est. 1939, will “assist the executive government in an intense social campaign against cancer.”
- LAC disbanded 1941.
- National Cancer Institute renamed National Radiotherapy Institute 1942
  - Mostajo on scraping away old INC sign: “as if it were a commercial establishment.”



- INR's Oscar Soto, 1948: "A league without a hospital will end up fading, with disillusioned patients unable to get care tuning out the league's message. A hospital without a league condemns the hospital to keep on treating advanced cases and to yield extremely low rates of cure, which in turn makes the public lose faith in treatment and turn away from the hospital."
- Soto on the new League Against Cancer: "it is our well-founded hope that success will crown our efforts."



Coburn, C., and D. Collingridge, "Cancer in Peru: A Detailed Examination,"  
The Lancet Oncology 18,10(2017):1300-1301.

Farmer, Paul, et al. "Expansion of Cancer Care and Control in Countries of  
Low and Middle Income: A Call to Action. *Lancet*, v.376, n.9747, p.1186-1193.  
2010



# Changing the Questions

- From: “why did Latin American nations begin to take steps towards cancer control in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?”
- To: “why have previous efforts, such as the LAC, lacked continuity or become invisible?”