

Adib Jatene

Brazilian cardiac surgeon who developed the “Jatene procedure” for newborn babies

Adib Jatene (b 1929; q São Paulo University 1953), died from acute myocardial infarction in São Paulo on 14 November 2014.

In 2002, after being inducted into the Paediatric Cardiology Hall of Fame, Adib Domingos Jatene was interviewed by the journal *Cardiology in the Young*. Jatene revealed one of the guiding principles of his life. “I prefer one thousand times the tears of defeat than the shame of not having fought,” he said. And then, with a grin on his friendly face, he admitted that he had read the words on the bumper sticker of a truck in his native Brazil. “Isn’t that a beauty?” he said.¹

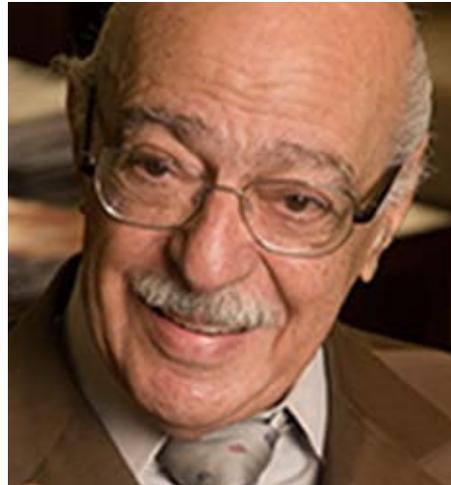
Borrowed from a truck’s bumper sticker or not, the adage accurately reflects Jatene’s personality. In 1975 he had the courage to attempt the first anatomic repair of transposition of the great arteries—a birth defect of the large arteries of the heart known by the abbreviation TGA. After deciding to attempt the complex surgery, Jatene prepared by frequently examining the 62 TGA specimens and other congenital cardiac lesions in the laboratory of the Dante Pazzanese Institute of Cardiology in São Paulo. He also reviewed literature on the topic, including a paper by Harold Albert, who suggested that “the problem could be solved if the coronary arteries could be transposed.”²

His first attempt was on a 3 month old child with TGA and ventricular septal defect (VSD). The child initially showed “good recovery from the operation, with normal cardiocirculatory conditions,” but died from renal failure on the third postoperative day.

“But that case convinced me that the operation was feasible,” Jatene later recalled.³

The second attempt was on a 40 day old infant with TGA and VSD. This time the operation was successful. His first paper detailing the success was published in *Arquivos Brasileiros de Cardiologia*, the journal of the Brazilian Society of Cardiology, in 1975.⁴ A more detailed paper came the next year in the *Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*.⁵

Vera Demarchi Aiello, director of the laboratory of pathology at the Heart Institute of São Paulo University Medical School says: “Two aspects contributed to [Jatene’s] success: his extraordinary skills as a cardiac surgeon performing both adult and congenital heart surgeries, and the contribution of the clinical team in choosing the best suitable cases for the first operations.”



The procedure, now recognised internationally as the “Jatene procedure,” has since been refined and is now regularly and successfully performed around the world. A 2008 editorial in the *Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* describes the operation as a “monumental contribution to the treatment of congenital heart disease” that has “dramatically improved the long-term outcomes of

children born with TGA.” The editorial adds: “The bravery and courage of a surgeon in deciding to perform a new operation of such technical complexity, never performed before, requiring the delicate coronary transfer in a small child, is immeasurable.”³

Jatene was born on 4 June 1929 in Xapuri, a town near the rainforest in far western Brazil, near the borders with Bolivia and Peru. He was one of four sons of Lebanese immigrants. When he was 2 years old, his father died from yellow fever. Seeking better educational opportunities for the children, his mother moved the family to Uberlândia in southeastern Brazil. After completing grammar school, Jatene and two of his brothers were sent to São Paulo, where he completed his secondary education.

Jatene was interested in science and initially considered a career in engineering but chose medicine instead. In 1948 he began his medical studies at São Paulo University, with the goal of returning to his birthplace in western Brazil for a career in preventive medicine. But while still a student, he caught the attention of Euryclides de Jesus Zerbini, who pioneered cardiac surgery in Brazil, and in 1968 performed the first heart transplantation in Latin America.

In 1951 Jatene was part of Zerbini’s team that performed the first valvular commissurotomy in Brazil on a patient with mitral stenosis. After graduating from medical school, he remained in São Paulo for two years of cardiac surgery training at São Paulo University Hospital.

Jatene in 1955 moved back to Minas Gerais, introducing thoracic surgery to the region and teaching topographical anatomy at the University of Uberaba. He returned to São Paulo in 1958 to work under Zerbini as a surgeon at the university’s Heart Institute of the Hospital das Clínicas. Here he organised a research laboratory, and designed and constructed his first artificial heart-lung machine. The laboratory evolved into the highly regarded bioengineering division of the institute.

In 1961 he took a permanent position at the Dante Pazzanese Institute of Cardiology, where he eventually became medical director and general director. When his mentor Zerbini retired in 1983, Jatene was named titular professor of thoracic surgery at the University of São Paulo; he was also the director of the Heart Institute until he reached mandatory retirement at age 70.

During his medical and academic career, Jatene served in a variety of public positions, including as health secretary of São Paulo from 1979 to 1982, and as Brazil’s minister of health for eight months in 1990 and again for 22 months starting in 1995.

As a public servant, famous surgeon, and respected academic, Jatene advocated a comprehensive healthcare system to provide “quality multiprofessional medical care to all citizens, independent of their economic and social situation,” according to a tribute published in 2010 by the *São Paulo Medical Journal* to mark Jatene’s 80th birthday.⁶

Jatene was a founder and president of the Brazilian Society of Cardiovascular Surgery, president of the Brazilian Cardiology Society, and president of the International Society for Cardiovascular Surgery. He was the recipient of 178 titles and honours from more than 10 nations.

An author on nearly 300 research papers, he was also a member of 32 scientific societies around the world. When interviewed after his induction into the Paediatric Cardiology Hall of Fame, he said of his love of science: “There is no science without humanism. Scientific development is only conceived if directed towards the wellbeing of people.”¹

Jatene leaves his wife, Aurice; two sons; and two daughters.

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