

ONE
LIFE IN
MEDICINE

António Gentil Martins

By

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António Gentil da Silva Martins was born on the 10th of July 1930 and graduated in medicine from the Faculdade de Medicina – Universidade de Lisboa (Medical Faculty of the University of Lisbon). He early decided to pursue a career in pediatric surgery. His training included a scholarship in the United Kingdom, namely in London, at the Hospital for Sick Children (at Great Ormond Street), working under Sir Denis Browne and David Innes Williams. He later moved to Liverpool's Alder Hey Children's Hospital, working under Isabella Forshall and Peter Paul Rickham. In 1960, he started in Lisbon a medical-surgical pediatric unit for children, the first in the world. He was a founder of the International Associations for the Care of Children with Cancer (SIOP and IPSO) and became an honorary member of both. He pursued his medical career at the Lisbon pediatric hospital, the "Hospital Dona Estefânia", becoming head of the surgery department, and was also appointed as professor of pediatric surgery at "Nova Medical School" – Faculdade de Ciências Médicas de Lisboa. Furthermore, he practiced pediatric surgery in several areas, which gave him special skills when he dealt with conjoined twins. Dur-



António Gentil Martins at the Ordem dos Médicos' gallery of presidents, next to his own portrait. (Photo: Victor Oliveira)

ing his long career, he operated on 7 pairs, with 9 children surviving, which was an outstanding achievement.

His commitment to medicine led him to fight for the rights and dignity of the medical profession, as well as for the patients' sake. He presided over the "Ordem dos Médicos,"^[1] the Portuguese medical association, from 1977 until 1986, during a particularly agitated social and political period in Portugal. Following in his father's footsteps, he also successfully practiced several sports, especially shooting, having participated in the Olympic Games of Rome in 1960.

He is the heir to distinguished medical ancestry. His father, **António** Augusto da Silva **Martins** (1892/1930) was a surgeon who worked with the neuro-

logist Egas Moniz, performing, under his supervision, the first cerebral angiogram. He invented an instrument (bearing his name) that allowed the clamping of the carotid artery, an essential step to the success of the procedure. António Martins was a multifaceted person also receiving recognition as a patriot, joining voluntarily, as a doctor, the Portuguese troops in the French trenches during the First World War. He was also a sportsman, practicing various sports in Portugal and abroad, taking part in the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp and the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris in the shooting discipline^[2]. Unfortunately, his life was short, dying tragically in an accident with his rifle at a shooting range, in 1930^[3]. His son, António, was not even 3 months old.

His grandfather, **Francisco** Soares Branco **Gentil** (1878-1964) was a professor of surgery who dedicated most of his life to fighting cancer. He

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For over half a century, António Gentil Martins has been dedicated to pediatric surgery, performing extraordinary feats such as separating seven pairs of conjoined twins. However, his legacy extends beyond the operating room: he has been a steadfast advocate for medical ethics and a leader in the fight for the rights of patients and physicians in Portugal, leaving an indelible mark on global medicine.”

founded a public hospital for the care of patients with cancer: the “Instituto Português de Oncologia” (Portuguese Oncology Institute), a prestigious Institution that still remains a pillar of cancer treatment in Portugal, with several branches spread throughout the country. He was also the medical advisor on the technical board for the construction in 1953 of the University Hospitals of Santa Maria (Lisboa) and S. João (Porto) and also the “Maternidade Alfredo da Costa,” still the largest maternity in Lisbon. In the ancestry of António Gentil Martins figures Francisco **Soares Franco** (1771–1844)^[4] a chairman of anatomy and director of the University Hospital in Coimbra. He was the first president of the scientific medical society: “Sociedade das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa,” in 1822,^[5] one of the oldest in the world.

António Gentil Martins keeps strong convictions both in medicine and sports, particularly in ethical domains. He is a strong defender of ethics in the medical profession, protecting both physicians and patients. He bears definite positions about sporting truth and is very critical of the gender re-assignment of athletes based on their sexual characteristics. In his nineties, he still is an active participant in medical events, and his thoughts are very much taken into consideration.

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