

Revisiting Deolindo Couto (1902–1992): From National Patron to Transatlantic Diplomat

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ABSTRACT: This article revisits the enduring legacy of Deolindo Couto, the esteemed Patron of the Brazilian Academy of Neurology. It explores how Couto's foundational contributions—succeeding Antônio Austregésilo Rodrigues de Lima, the founder of Brazilian neurology, establishing Brazil's first Institute of Neurology, and leading the creation of the Brazilian Academy of Neurology, were intricately linked to his role as a cultural and diplomatic bridge between Brazil and Portugal. By celebrating the scientific achievements of Egas Moniz and embracing the literary heritage of Camilo Castelo Branco, Couto masterfully connected national professional identity with international recognition. His story reveals how the development of a medical specialty in 20th-century Brazil was deeply intertwined with the cultivation of transatlantic prestige and intellectual exchange.

KEYWORDS: History of Medicine; Neurology; Diplomacy; Deolindo Couto; Egas Moniz; Camilo Castelo Branco

Three decades after his passing, the career of Deolindo Augusto de Nunes Couto (1902–1992) continues to inspire reflection and critical examination. His life and work offer more than just a narrative of achievement; they provide a window into the complex forces that shaped Brazilian neurology in the 20th century. Couto's legacy is unique: he is celebrated as the Patron of the Brazilian Academy of Neurology (ABN), a title that underscores his pivotal role in organizing and elevating the specialty nationally, while also serving as a key figure in the Luso-Brazilian intellectual and diplomatic landscape (Figure 1).

Born in Teresina, Piauí, in 1902, Couto's journey began with a medical degree from the National College of Medicine of the University of Brazil (now UFRJ) in 1926. His career was marked by a relentless commitment to excellence and innovation. As a tenured professor at the National Faculty of Medicine in Rio de Janeiro, the Fluminense Faculty of Medicine, and the Rio de Janeiro School of Medicine and Surgery, he influenced generations of neurologists.



Fig 1. Portrait of Deolindo Augusto de Nunes Couto (1902–1992), a pioneering figure in Brazilian neurology and the Patron of the Brazilian Academy of Neurology. Source: Adapted from the original provided by the National Academy of Medicine (ANM). Reproduced with permission.



Fig 2. Institute of Neurology Deolindo Couto (INDC/UFRJ), Rio de Janeiro Founded in 1946 by Deolindo Couto, this institution remains a cornerstone of neurological research and education in Brazil. Source: Photograph by the author (MMG).

He was a Full Professor of Neurology and later an Emeritus Member at the University of Brazil's National College of Medicine, as well as a Full Professor of Clinical Neurology at the Federal Fluminense University (UFF) and the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO). His leadership was instrumental in founding and directing the Institute of Neurology in 1946, now called the Institute of Neurology Deolindo Couto (INDC), a groundbreaking institution that became the cornerstone of neurological research and education in Brazil (Figure 2).

Couto's administrative acumen was further demonstrated in his roles as Vice-Rector and Rector of UFRJ, and President of the Federal Council of Education, where he helped shape national higher education policies. His intellectual and cultural contributions were equally remarkable, earning him membership in both the National Academy of Medicine, where he served five terms as President (1955–1959, 1969–1971, 1973–1975, 1977–1979, and 1981–1983), and the Brazilian Academy of Letters, a rare honor for a physician.

Couto's impact extended far beyond Brazil's borders. He represented the country in the World Federation of Neurology and played significant roles in international congresses in Paris, Lisbon, Brussels, and Rome. His honorary memberships in prestigious societies, such as the French Society of Neurology and the American

Neurological Association, underscored his global influence. His written works, including *Clínica Neurológica* (1944) and *O tremor parkinsoniano e a via piramidal* (1945), as well as his founding of the *Jornal Brasileiro de Neurologia*, cemented his reputation as a leading voice in the field. Yet, his influence was not limited to academia. He unified Brazil's neurology schools, bridging regional divides, and his name lives on through the INDC/UFRJ, a testament to his enduring legacy.

A defining moment in Couto's career came in 1953 at the 5th International Congress of Neurology in Lisbon. Here, he acted not only as a scientist but also as a diplomat, publicly praising Egas Moniz, the Portuguese Nobel laureate, and highlighting Brazil's role in nominating Moniz for the Nobel Prize. His words "Science owes him a great deal. I hold the deepest veneration for this wise Lusitanian scholar" were more than a tribute; they were a strategic affirmation of Brazil's connection to European medical tradition, positioning Couto as a vital link between the two cultures. This mutual respect is immortalized in a photograph of Egas Moniz with a dedication to Deolindo Couto (Figure 3). Couto's book *Dois Sábios Ibéricos* (Two Iberian Sages) praised Egas Moniz and Santiago Ramón y Cajal, both Nobel laureates.

Couto's admiration for Moniz was matched by his passion for the works of Camilo Castelo Branco, whose



Fig 3. Egas Moniz's Tribute to Deolindo Couto (1951) Egas Moniz's dedication to Deolindo Couto, inscribed: "To the illustrious Professor Dr. Deolindo Couto, a friendly tribute from Egas Moniz, ... 1951." This photograph symbolizes the transatlantic collaboration between Brazilian and Portuguese neurology. Source: Museum Collection of the Deolindo Couto Institute of Neurology (INDC/UFRJ). Reproduced with permission.



Fig 4. Commemorative medal honoring Deolindo Couto (1902–1992), featuring his portrait and the Neurology Institute he founded. Source: Digital design by MMG.

literary legacy he championed. This dual engagement with science and culture reflected Couto's unique ability to navigate both worlds, enriching his medical mission with a broader intellectual and diplomatic purpose.

Couto's legacy is complex. He was a demanding yet inspiring mentor, and the institutions he helped build, while foundational, were also products of their time, marked by the hierarchies and inequalities of Brazilian academia. He received numerous honors and medals, including the Medal of the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon and the D. João VI Order of Merit (ANM). His enduring impact is further symbolized by commemorative tributes such as the medal honoring his life and contributions (Figure 4), which celebrates his lasting influence on Brazilian neurology and academia.

Reflecting on Deolindo Couto's career reveals that the history of a medical specialty is not just a chronicle of scientific progress. It is also a story of institutional consolidation, personal diplomacy, and cultural affinity. His life, bridging the roles of national patron and transatlantic diplomat, invites us to consider how professional identity is often shaped by the strategic cultivation of prestige and networks abroad.

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