## THE RECEPTION OF PENICILLIN IN PORTUGAL (1945-1950)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The discovery of penicillin by Alexander Fleming in 1928, followed by its transformation into a medicine as a result of the work of Howard Florey and Ernst Boris Chain (who all shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1945) and other collaborators, is one of the most significant moments in the history of 20th century science, medicine and pharmacy. If we consider the combined effects of scientific innovation, the benefits to public health and, consequently, the economic gains, it may be said that the discovery of penicillin was the most important advance in the history of science in the 20th. century.

Penicillin was not just one more new medicinal product or one more isolated scientific event. It paved the way for new scientific investments in the field of antibiotherapy and consequently the discovery of new antibiotics, boosted scientific research and systematic clinical studies, led to new technical and technological investments in the industrial production of antibiotics, expanded the market for medicines and, most importantly of all, provided a cure for infectious pathologies for which there had been no previous effective treatment and, as such, was reflected in the enhanced quality of peoples' lives or even in the possibility of life itself which, translated into demographic terms, meant that deaths were reduced in all age groups.

# THE DISSEMINATION OF PENICILLIN IN PORTUGAL: THE ROLE OF THE PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENTISTS

In searching through the pages of various scientific journals, we found some articles whose essential focus was to explain, through reviews, summaries or clinical studies, the value of penicillin. From the mid 1940s onwards, studies on the applications of penicillin could be found in various medical periodicals and many translations of studies from foreign journals were also published. In addition, we found review studies of penicillin, considered by many to be a wonder drug, such were the benefits of its use.

In this context, mention should be made of the works published by the doctors José Garrett and Pimentel Barata, for example, two leading figures who pioneered the written dissemination of the clinical aspects of penicillin in Portugal. Some statistical studies also emerged occasionally, which are very interesting from different points of view.

In relation to the work of the pharmaceutical writers, mention should also be made of the studies by Luís da Silva Carvalho, Maria Serpa dos Santos and Raúl de Carvalho, to whom this work is dedicated. Luís da Silva Carvalho was just starting out in his career as a teacher at the University of Coimbra School of Pharmacy.

In 1949 he (L.S.Carvalho) published a large 568-page volume entitled Penicilina. Propriedades, ensaios e preparações galénicas ("Penicillin: Properties, trials and galenical preparations"). The book was divided into three sections: 1 — The properties of penicillin; 2 — Standards, units and trials; 3<sup>a</sup> — Galenical preparations for penicillin. In this work, the author provided a thorough overall review of penicillin, including, amongst other topics, chemical structure, synthesis, antibacterial activity and toxicity, absorption and excretion, mechanism of action, stability, standards and units, assessment of penicillin content, resistance and technological questions relating to injectable substances, capsules, pills, medicinal drinks, powders, ointments, pastilles, suppositories, globuli, etc.

- At the end of the book, certain pages were reserved for advertising for the pharmaceutical laboratories, both foreign and Portuguese, which manufactured medicines made from penicillin:
  - —Pfizer (represented in Portugal by the Companhia Portuguesa de Higiene), which advertised penicillin G;
  - —the Sociedade Industrial Farmacêutica/Laboratórios Azevedos (which offered a penicillin ointment for the first time in Portugal in 1946);
  - —ophthalmic ointments made from penicillin and penicillin and atropine manufactured under the Dávi brand name (from Laboratórios da Farmácia Jaime Costa);

- —CSC-Wander Penicillin, from the Sociedade Portuguesa de Produtos Wander, Lda.;
- —"A&H" Penicillin, represented in Portugal by Coll Taylor, Lda (Lisbon);
- —Penicilina "Avlon" produced by Imperial Chemical (Pharmaceuticals) Limited, represented in Portugal by the Companhia União Fabril and advertised by ICI,
- —Olicilina, advertised by the Farmácia Barral laboratories. It should be noted that, from the mid 1940s onwards, it was common to find penicillin advertised in Portuguese publications.

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BIBLIOTECA

## PENICILINA

PROPRIEDADES, ENSAIOS E PREPARAÇÕES GALÉNICAS

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COIMBRA 1 9 4 9 Maria Serpa dos Santos, a professor at the University of Coimbra School of Pharmacy, wrote various articles on penicillin, some of which were published in the Noticias Farmacêuticas journal and the Boletim da Escola de Farmácia. This included a study published in 1943, which was evidence of the up-to-date scientific knowledge of the author. It was a general review study of penicillin which included the physical-chemical properties of penicillin, its activity, its actions on human and animal organisms, its therapeutic actions, etc. The author states that Fleming was considered "the greatest of all his peers". Another work published in 1945 by the same author was the result of laboratory studies involving penicillin, undertaken at the Cryptogamy and Fermentation Laboratory at the University of Coimbra School of Pharmacy.

In 1944, Raúl de Carvalho, a professor at the University of Lisbon School of Pharmacy, published an overall review in the Jornal dos Farmacêuticos entitled Penicilina. Seu estudo entre 1929 e 1943 "(The Study of Penicillin: 1929 to 1943"). The author began with a review of antibiotic substances, then focussed his attention on penicillin. He provided a historical summary of the history of the drug, then discussed its physical-chemical characteristics, antimicrobial properties, industrial production and costs, batching and storage, trials on animals and humans, pharmaceutical formats containing penicillin, dosage, etc. At the end of the article, the author included a long list of bibliographical references (268 references).

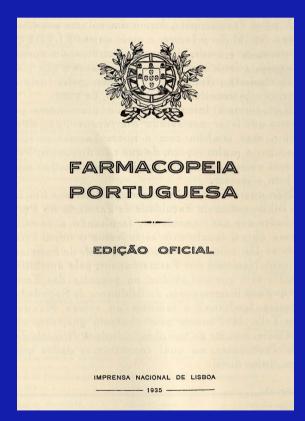
Raúl de Carvalho, was fully aware of the great pharmatherapeutic value of penicillin and the economic potential that could be derived from its industrial production, if this could be realised. However the author was also aware of the fact that Portugal had no tradition of chemical industry, which was indispensable to the industrial production of penicillin.

In the early 1940s penicillin was received in Portugal as an authentic *miracle cure*. Before it was produced in Portugal, the first batches of penicillin were imported directly from the United States of America via the Portuguese Red Cross.

# PENICILLIN IN THE PORTUGUESE PHARMACOPOEIA: OFFICIAL REGISTRATION OF THE DRUG

appeared in the official Penicillin **Portuguese** pharmacopoeia for the first time in the Supplement to the Farmacopeia Portuguesa IV (1961), i.e. in the supplement to the second edition of the Farmacopeia Portuguesa IV, which was published in 1946. This supplement included various drugs which urgently needed to be included in the Farmacopeia. The Supplement to the Farmacopeia also included, amongst other substances, corticosteroids, vitamins, central analgesics, local anaesthetics, analeptics, tranquilizers, etc.

In addition to monographic references on the characterisation of penicillin, the Supplement also included a chapter devoted to the "biological assessment of antibiotics".



# THE DEATH OF FLEMING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PENICILLIN: ECHOES IN THE PORTUGUESE PRESS

The death of Fleming was reported in the world's press with a flood of words and images which fuelled the representation of the scientist as a hero and his discovery as a miracle. The Portuguese press, in particular the daily papers, collaborated with great dignity in this process on the occasion of the death of Fleming. In general, the news reports took the following format: information on the death of Fleming, a detailed biography of Fleming, noting his modest background, simple personality and two marriages, the award of the Nobel Prize, the value of his discovery and the benefits to humanity of penicillin.

On the very day of his death, 11 March 1955, the Portuguese evening newspapers, such as the *Diário de Notícias*, the *República* and the *Diário Popular*, announced the unexpected death of Fleming.

On 12 March and the days which followed, the Portuguese daily papers, such as the Jornal de Notícias, O Primeiro de Janeiro, O Comércio do Porto, O Século, Diário da Manhã, Diário de Notícias, Novidades and the Diário de Coimbra devoted a great deal of attention to the death of Fleming and the value of penicillin.



O prof. Fleming no seu laboratório

### O PROF. FLEMING co MORREU

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Pleming nasceu na Escócia, em Lochfield, em 1881. Era o mais novo dos oito filhos de uma familia de



O Prof. Fleming, em Setembro de 1946, fotografado à sua che-gada ao Aeroporto de Lisboa

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príncipe negro de Swanzi, em viagem de estudo na Europa, e o seu preceptor visitaram há dias os ursos do parque de Berna.

O director do parque, ao saber que. O director do parque, ao saber que, eram os visitantes, envergou o seu fraque e, para que eles se divertissem com os animais, apresentou-lhes numa bondeja de prata algumas cenouras; O principe e o preceptor agradeceram com um sorriso a gentileza e, com asconto de toda a gente, comeram o que ra destinado aos ursos.

organização Mitsui, para se adaptar á vida economica do Japão, acaba de estabeleçes em bases praticas o serviço de casamentos. Assim, oferece aos celibata rios desejosos de mudarem de estado o noivo ou a noiva; fornece os trajos nupciais e os cuidados higienicos (banho perfumado, corte de cabelo, trata mento do tosto e das mãos); serve um posso esquecer a assiduldade com que hon- nhã seguinte.

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que inventou a penicilina

LONDRES, II — Sir Alexander Fleming, inventor da penicilina, fa-ceu repentinamente, necta cidade, de um ataque cardíaco. Contava 73 los. A criada de quartio declarou; «Sir Alexander sinda ontem parecia war de excelente saúde. Esta manhá, level-lhe, como de costume, o pe-

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In the reports we analysed, Fleming was acknowledged as a

- —"a benefactor to the world",
- -"discoverer",
- -"inventor",
- -- "genius",
- —"outstanding figure in science",
- —"learned mind",
- -"scholar",
- -- "scientist",
- —"Humanity's benefactor".

They wrote that penicillin was discovered through a "the intuition of genius" and was a "miraculous event", a "a prodigious discovery", "a marvel", "a miracle", "a happy occasion", "a stroke of genius", etc.

- —Due to its therapeutic properties and benefits to humanity, penicillin was described in the papers as a —"wonder cure",
  - —"miracle cure",
  - —"wonder drug",
  - -- "extraordinary cure", etc.

Fleming would therefore remain for all time in the "ranks of the immortals" and was considered "the greatest figure in 20th century medicine". In this way, the non-specialist Portuguese press reproduced the international news which focussed on one single name — Fleming — casting a shadow over all the efforts and merits of many other scientists, in particular Florey and Chain.



## Penicilina-A Droga Mágica

Por J. D. RATCLIFF

da revista "Reader's Digest"

A penicilina é uma nova e poderosa arma descoberta pelos cientistas no combate às doenças.

S CIENTISTAS americanos estão hoje convencidos de que a penicilina, uma nova droga, é a mais poderosa arma jamais encontrada contra várias enfermidades - entre elas, a septicemia, pneumonia e gonorréia. É até mais eficaz que as famosas drogas sulfa, nas infecções estreptocócicas. O mais extraordinário facto é que, um ano atrás, a penicilina era uma curiosidade de laboratório, conhecida por alguns pesquisadores.

A história da droga mágica comeca em 1929, quando o Dr. Alexander Fleming, trabalhando no seu laboratório na Universi-

placa de vidro com uma cultura leitosa de milhões de bactérias. Sua vista treinada notou algo estranho. Havia uma partícula de môfo verde na placa e, ao redor dela, um círculo límpido de fluido. Algo estava destruindo as bactérias! Uma partícula de môfo trazida pelo ar estava causando a sua morte súbita, numa escala sem precedentes. Esse môfo era o Penicillium notatum. Alguma substância segregada por êle era o destruïdor dos micróbios.

O Dr. Fleming recolheu a partícula de môfo, mas as pesquisas sôbre ela não progrediram por dez anos. Havia pouco interêsse, então, pela quimicoterapia (cura de enfermidades por meio de drogas químicas). Algumas vezes, essas dade de Londres, examinava uma drogas matavam os pacientes mais

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- —The specialist press, due to its nature and publication schedules, did not pay so much attention to the death of Fleming in terms of biographies, eulogies and creating a mythical status for his character.
- —However, on 17 March 1955, the journal *O Médico* announced the death of Fleming, stating that he was "one of the most famous figures in medicine of all time, due to his discovery of penicillin which, unlike other famous contemporary discoveries, has no adverse effects, i.e. its benefits come with no harmful effects for humanity". Pharmaceutical periodicals such as the Eco Farmacêutico journal devoted their entire front pages to reporting the death of the scientist, stating that: "unlike so many other scientists who have wasted their time on seeking out processes that can only help Death, Fleming has rescued thousands of lives from an early grave!".

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Since the 1940s, Portugal has remained notably up-to-date from a scientific and technical point of view with regard to the question of penicillin. Penicillin has been received in Portugal without any significant scientific controversy. The first batches of penicillin to arrive in Portugal came from the United States of America via the Portuguese Red Cross.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

However, various Portuguese pharmaceutical industries showed an immediate interest in industrial production. The figure of Fleming and the value of penicillin featured heavily in the Portuguese press at the time of Fleming's death in 1955. As with the press worldwide, the Portuguese press contributed towards construction of the so-called "myth of Fleming" since, whilst Fleming was elevated to the higher status of a genius, other scientists who were equally important to the manufacture of penicillin as a whole were neglected.

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