

Josep Esteve i Soler (1930-2019): Catalan pharmacist, businessman, academic, and president of a scientific foundation

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Family background

In the early 19th century, Tomàs Esteve i Gavanyach (1753-1830), the first pharmacist in the Esteve lineage, founded the *Plana de l'Om* pharmacy in Manresa, capital of Bages County. Originally from *Urús*, a small town in *la Cerdanya*, a large valley in the Catalan Pyrenees through which the border between France and Spain cuts, he had started his professional activity in Manresa's *Hospital de Sant Andreu* in 1787. Five generations later, Josep's Esteve i Soler's father, Antoni Esteve i Subirana (1902-1979) [Fig. 1], set up a small laboratory on the top floor of the old pharmacy in 1929, planting the seed that would grow into Esteve Pharmaceuticals¹.

In 1927, Antoni Esteve i Subirana's father, Josep Esteve i Seguí (1873-1927) [Fig. 1], died prematurely, so Antoni had to take on the responsibility of running the family pharmacy at the age of 15. The following year, he married Paquita Soler i Casulleras (1907-1992). Their first child, Josep Esteve i Soler, was born in Manresa on January 4, 1930. At this time, Antoni's professional life combined working in the family pharmacy and the laboratory above it with clinical analyses in *Hospital de Sant Andreu*, where his great-great grandfather had worked^{1,2}.

Although the political and economic conditions of the 1930s were unfavorable, Dr. Antoni Esteve and his wife managed to take care of their growing family without interrupting their business activity and research². This was no small feat in a decade that saw the Great Depression worldwide and the Civil War and establishment of Franco's dictatorship in Spain. Luckily, however, at that point in time, the pharmaceutical industry's role in Catalan industry was expanding³. Some companies in the sector arose from multinational chemical companies and others from family businesses, such as pharmacies, as in the Esteve family's case, or those selling cleaning products and other household items⁴. Despite the difficulties of the postwar period, the laboratory continued to grow and developed more products, such as arsenicals, sulfa drugs, penicillin, and antihemorrhagics². In 1942, the laboratory moved from Manresa to Barcelona.

Pharmacist and entrepreneur

After earning his degree in pharmacy, Josep Esteve i Soler [Fig. 1] joined the family business at the age of 23. He completed his education with an MBA (IESE, 1963) and a PharmD (University of Barcelona, 1970); thus, this member of the sixth generation of the Esteve pharmaceutical family was well prepared to run the family business^{1,2}.

For more than two decades, Josep Esteve i Soler made significant contributions to the research his father had established, leading to the synthesis of new drugs, including isoniazid, anti-inflammatory and antirheumatic drugs, and a new vasoprotective, calcium dobesilate (1971). The development of calcium dobesilate and the antihemorrhagics opened the door to future collaborations with businesses around the world, and these drugs became the first wholly Catalan drugs that were important worldwide². Josep Esteve said that his father had lived a “life firmly dedicated to pharmacy and research”, adding that he himself had “learned to value hard work and to respect a job well done from his father”⁵. Among Josep Esteve’s many friends from around the world, it is worth mentioning Paul Janssen [Fig 2.], a Belgian physician renowned for his research in pharmacology and his knowledge of medical chemistry. Janssen inherited the pharmaceutical company that his father had founded in 1935, and haloperidol was one of the 80 drugs it commercialized⁶. Josep Esteve referred to his friend as “a permanent source of knowledge, with whom I have shared long, unforgettable periods of scientific communication”⁵. Like Janssen, Josep Esteve inherited his father’s entrepreneurial spirit and helped expand the company scientifically and commercially. On the death of Antoni Esteve i Subirana in 1979, Josep Esteve took over the leadership of the company and remained its chief executive officer for 26 years (until 2005). As a pharmacist and a businessman, Josep Esteve knew how to maintain and promote the laboratory’s orientation toward research, while fostering the growth and international expansion of the business⁵. His professional productivity propelled him into various positions in diverse associations and resulted in many awards and distinctions from different institutions and civil society.

The academic

Among the many institutional positions of responsibility that Josep Esteve i Soler took on, especially noteworthy are his roles as the President of the Royal Academy of Pharmacy of Catalonia, a full member of the Royal Academy of Medicine of Catalonia, and a corresponding member of the *Académie Nationale de Pharmacie* in France. His participation in the Academy of Medical and Health Sciences of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands also deserves special mention. His father served as vice-president of this institution on two occasions, in 1936 under the presidency of Antoni Trias i Pujol (president of the Academy, 1936—1939) and in 1962 under the presidency of Joan Gibert i Queraltó (president of the Academy, 1958—1966) [Fig. 3]. Following in his father’s footsteps, Josep Esteve was vice-president of the Academy during the four years when Josep Alsina i Bonfill presided (1974—1978) [Fig. 3]⁷. Josep Esteve’s good friend Dr. Alsina was, in addition to a physician and professor, a strong promoter of Catalan medical terminology, participating in Corachan’s *Diccionari Mèdic*, *Vocabulari Mèdic*, and finally in *Diccionari Enciclopèdic de Medicina*⁸. This affinity for the Catalan language and culture was also evident in the Esteve family’s history, and especially in Josep Esteve i Seguí and his close friend and man of many talents, Dr. Oleguer Miró i Borràs (1849-1926)¹.

President of a scientific foundation

One of Josep Esteve’s outstanding contributions was his service as the president of the board of trustees of the foundation that bears his father’s name. Shortly after the death of Antoni

Esteve i Subirana, Josep Esteve, together with his brother, Joan, and his sister, Montserrat, created the Dr. Antoni Esteve Foundation (1982) to honor their father's memory publically.

With the primary aim of advancing drug therapy through scientific communication and discussion, the Dr. Antoni Esteve Foundation seeks to encourage multidisciplinary interchanges through a wide range of activities. The Foundation's initiatives can be roughly divided into events (e.g., training seminars, roundtables, international discussion groups, etc.) and publications (e.g., monographs summarizing the activity of the activities, scientific notebooks, and the Pharmacology Revisited book series, etc.). The Foundation is a nonprofit organization and all its publications are available free of charge in print upon request and can be downloaded directly from its website⁹. Moreover, many articles about the Foundation's activities have been published in scientific journals around the world. *Annals de Medicina* has played a significant role in disseminating the Foundation's activities.

From the very beginning, Josep Esteve i Soler and his siblings fought to strengthen the Foundation, ensure its continuity, and broaden its scope. They always defended the Foundation's independence from the laboratory, and it pleased them greatly that the Foundation spread their father's fame throughout the world. Josep Esteve often repeated what University of Barcelona Professor Roser González-Duarte said about the Foundation, that it was "*an institution that was dedicated to organizing high-quality scientific activities without making a big fuss about it*". Through the years, the Foundation has carried out about a thousand events in which more than 5000 biomedical professionals have participated. This success has been achieved in cooperation with 500 institutions, including universities, research centers, hospitals, and scientific associations, among others. The Foundation's activities have been both national and international in scope; it has been present on all continents and has brought top investigators from many countries to Catalonia⁹.

Epilogue

In 1999, the journal *Annals de Medicina* underlined the importance of Dr. Antoni Esteve i Subirana on the 20th anniversary of his demise¹⁰. Now, 20 years later and 40 years after Antoni Esteve i Subirana passed away, we are grateful for the contribution of the official journal of Academy of Medical and Health Sciences of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands to disseminating the work of his son, Dr. Josep Esteve i Soler, who was, like his father, a pharmacist and entrepreneur from Manresa and a member of the Academy's board. Among Dr. Josep Esteve i Soler's many initiatives, he created and presided over a prestigious scientific foundation based in Catalonia. This text aims to pay homage to Dr. Josep Esteve i Soler; the generosity of Dr. Esteve and his siblings gave rise to the Dr. Esteve Foundation, and many people have benefitted from its activities and publications. Dr. Josep Esteve i Soler left us on March 29, 2019 at the age of 89, but his memory will live on. We are proud that our institution forms part of his legacy.

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FIGURES

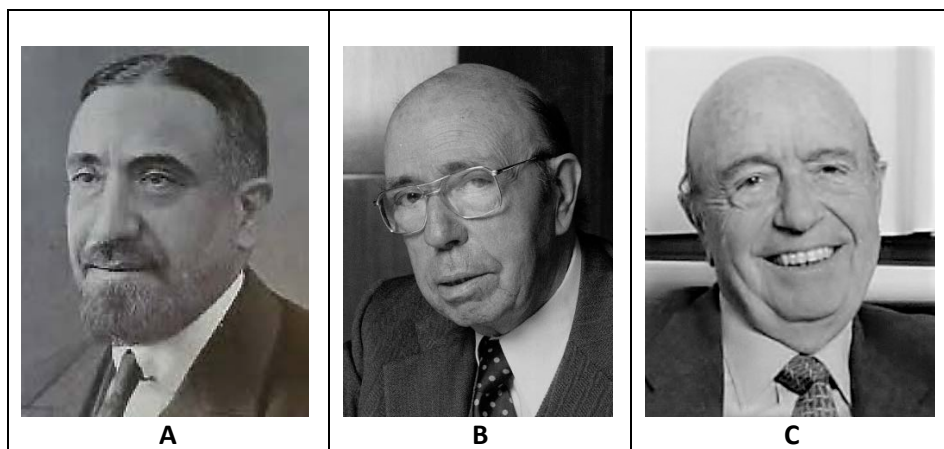


FIGURE 1. Fourth, fifth, and sixth generations of pharmacists in the Esteve family: A. Josep Esteve i Seguí (1873-1927); B. Antoni Esteve i Subirana (1902-1979); C. Josep Esteve i Soler (1930-2019).



FIGURE 2. The good relationship between Josep Esteve (at left) and Paul Janssen (1926-2003) favored business between the two companies.



FIGURE 3. Presidents of the Academy under whom Antoni Esteve i Subirana and Josep Esteve i Soler served as vice-presidents: A. Antoni Trias i Pujol (1892-1970) B. Joan Gibert i Queraltó (1907-1998): C. Josep Alsina i Bofill (1904-1993).

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