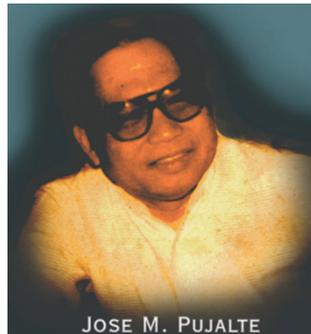


## OBITUARY



### Jose Magallanes Pujalte, MD 1928 – 2019

My father, endearingly called “*Pujie*”, by friends and colleagues died in the early morning of the 12th of April. He was 90. His instructions to me were clear: there should be no vigil, no funeral. The cremation must be done post haste, but he did agree to a holy mass or two. In two words – *no fanfare*. How he wanted his death to be observed was consistent, in fact, with his story arc. He was a small, quiet boy who was barely noticed in class. But he became a valedictorian in both grade school and high school at Manila’s Benedictine school of San Beda. He finished medical school at the University of the Philippines (UP, 1953). As one of the first graduates of the orthopaedic residency program at the National Orthopaedic Hospital (NOH), Dr Pujalte became organic in the institution that he grew to love and serve for 33 years. He was a Colombo Plan scholar in the early 1960s and was sent to England for a vascular surgical fellowship. This added an extra dimension and grit to his surgical prowess. As a permanent apprentice, I saw and learned first-hand his tremendous skill and precision on the operating table. His later sabbaticals brought him to the US and back again to England for the spine and joint replacement fellowships. He was always learning, teaching, writing and publishing. Despite a busy schedule, he studied again for two master’s degrees in hospital administration (MHA) and public administration (MPA), both at UP. No doubt, these helped him in his steady rise in the NOH from Chief of Clinics in the late 1970s to Chief of Hospital in 1980.

His people skills were legendary, and this was from his propensity to please or connect (he was, after all an only child). I knew his friendships were genuine because they were few, and they would last. One such bond was with the shoulder master Katsuya Nobuhara. A fruit of this friendship was the more than 30 NOH fellowships in Japan. He was *paternal* to his residents and would make sure that they were sent abroad and that they would bring home the latest technology. These juniors settled all over the country and so in a way he seeded orthopaedics.

Dr Pujalte was a leader and pioneer in Philippine surgery and medicine. He was President of the Philippine Orthopaedic Association (1972-73), the Philippine College of Surgeons (1981), and the Philippine Medical Association (1985). He taught orthopaedics too, and to this day, I am approached by strangers to tell me they remember him from medical school.

He knew and therefore seized the moment when power, influence and authority resided briefly in one person. Dr Pujalte, at his peak, used this confluence to propel a vision of a unified regional orthopaedics. Thus was born in Manila, in 1981, the ASEAN Orthopaedic Association. He was the Founding President. Of late, our ASEAN leaders talk of "integration" and "porous borders" and yet the orthopaedic surgeons of the region have been joining hands since the 1980s. His core values were: discipline, courage, integrity, hard work, compassion, fairness, generosity, and, humility.

He was married to Raquel (a dentist, deceased). He had four children: Benigno (an orthopaedic surgeon), Fides (an architect), Jose Jr (an orthopaedic surgeon) and Vernon (a businessman, also deceased). In his later years, he doted on his granddaughters who only remember him as a funny, old man who snored. He let them get away with too many sweets or sleeping late.

He was a good man, but he was no saint. Though he was less than Epicurean about food, he had a weakness for whisky and women. That rascal glint in his eye informed me that he knew how to *live* too. This man had a full, unrepeatable, enviable life. He treated and cured innumerable patients. Dr Pujalte taught and inspired many surgeons and countless more consider him a mentor, even a father. I have lost a teacher, a father and a best friend.

He leaves this world a much better place. That is more than enough for a good man.

**By Dr Jose Pujalte Jr.**