

Ceremony to award Alejandro Jadad an honorary doctorate Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, CCCB

Honourable consul for Colombia,
deans,
teaching and administrative staff from the UOC,
Dr Jadad and family,
ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to this ceremony to award Dr Alejandro Jadad an honorary doctorate from our university.

Having listened to *Carriers*, sung by Nerea de Miguel, with Leo Aldrey on piano and Andrés Eduardo Bucci on Reactable, I'm now pleased to be able to hand over to Dr Pilar García Lorda, dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, who, on behalf of her Faculty and that of Psychology and Education Sciences, proposed to the Executive Board that Dr Jadad be awarded an honorary doctorate.

Dr García Lorda, when you're ready.

[Dr García Lorda's speech]

Dr Manuel Armayones, Development Director of the UOC's eHealth Center, will now deliver the oration for Dr Alejandro Jadad. Dr Armayones, please.

[Dr Armayones's speech]

Dr Pere Fabra, general secretary of the UOC, will now read the decision reached by the Executive Board to award Dr Alejandro Jadad an honorary doctorate. Dr Fabra, when you're ready.

[Dr Fabra speaks]

We've just heard John Lennon's *Love*. I understand that both the song and the artist are particular favourites of Dr Jadad's. Indeed, he started a recent article by paying homage to another of Lennon's famous songs: "Imagine a world in which every human being...".

Dr Alejandro Jadad's mission reminds me of that famous image conjured up by Eduardo Galeano where utopia acts an incentive to improve. For this reason, for the example he sets and for his general attitude, it is an honour today to formally welcome him to our university.

Dr Jadad, I hand over to you.

[Dr Jadad's speech]

Awarding an honorary doctorate means that leading figures from outside a university can be invited to form part of it. It is an honour, and what is more, an honour for both sides. Firstly, these awards let the institution establish the kind of genealogy it aspires to, a way of understanding the scholarship and research with which it identifies and wishes to project.

And likewise, Dr Jadad's career and vision act as a spur to keep us on a trail he has blazed like no one else: seeing health as a global question. Indeed, this view of things harks back to what we are told Hippocrates once said. The so-called father of medicine warned us that physicians giving the job their all is not enough if their efforts are not reciprocated by everyone else involved. Having taken on board this holistic approach, we have now evolved it further, moving the focus from the physician to the person.

You'll have noticed that I said *person*, not *patient*, because health is no longer defined as the absence of illness or, as one of the founders of the UOC, Dr Josep Laporte, put it ironically, «a temporary state that doesn't bode well». We now know that, to a greater or lesser extent, illness is always with us. Compared to the past, our life expectancy has increased exponentially, and tomorrow's generations seem to be coming close to immortality... or not...

The leading elites may be able to afford the costs of immortality (or near immortality) in the coming decades. But for the rest of us the aim will remain that – thanks to the advances in medicine and science – many of those illnesses that have historically been most devastating will be curable or at least chronic rather than fatal. Obviously, not all of them, but a great many.

This leads to a change in how we see things, where what becomes key is our level of well-being. If there isn't a cure, at least we can be healthy sick people. In light of this, **shouldn't we be looking into the causes of health?**

Briefly – let me share with you another of the many things I fail to understand: normally, when faced with extremely variable levels of success in our activities, we tend to come up with ways to analyse why the unsuccessful ones fail. If we thought about this a little, we'd realize that this is somewhat arrogant, given that, if we focused on what the successful ones had in common too, we might not only find puzzles and surprises, but also gain a more comprehensive and holistic view of things.

I'll come back to this later, but unfortunately the word 'holistic' has attained something of a bad reputation, especially in the field of health. I'd like to try to recover its general use in the field of science; let's see if I can help save it from its current ignominy.

Again, if we look at ancient Greece, we can find an important precedent for this view of things in the famous words of the oracle of Delphi: «Know thyself». And I want to stress this idea of knowing yourself, because health – our health, not some unspecific, indeterminate health – is education, is knowledge. And this is where the UOC has a role to play.



«In a world where knowledge is no longer locked in classrooms, libraries or labs, but found in companies, hospitals, workshops and creative individuals, the university of the 21st century has become, above all else, a node for knowledge and exchange.»

Obviously, we continue to generate knowledge and know-how, we continue to carry out research, but we've also learned the importance of connecting, multiplying, facilitating, linking, and so on.

«Universities in general and the UOC in particular are the link in the chain that can make today's network of knowledge a driver of research and development.»

But for this node role to achieve its full potential, it has to go beyond specialists and researchers, and be made available to society in general.

Knowledge has to reach individuals, knowledge has to be useful to people so that they can manage their own health, their own well-being and, where necessary, their own illness in the best way possible.

We need to create 'virtual hospitals'. Without wanting to replace medical centres and hospitals, which of course are vital for treating illness and injury, we also need centres that focus on health and knowledge. And without wanting to replace healthcare professionals, who are vital for handling patients and emergencies, we want to come up with new ways of educating others and ourselves: places **where we can gain awareness, learning and understanding**.

Awareness... because we need to appreciate the importance of our health, understanding it not as the absence of illness, but as a more complex and evolving state, **where the key idea is well-being**.

Learning... because with knowledge we can make conscious decisions about the implications of our lifestyles, medical treatments, or our own human nature.

And **understanding**... because only by grasping the essence of our health can we become empowered, to use a buzzword, as **independent citizens**.



*«A network used to spur knowledge and autonomy.
A network seen as a means to health and
empowerment.
A network that becomes a forum for citizens and
education.»*

And, obviously, if we're talking about knowledge, autonomy, health, empowerment, education and citizens, then we're talking about the UOC.

Our university is still young and was blessed with the fortune of being devised by open minds, such as our founding president, Gabriel Ferraté, minds **able to harness the disruptive power of the internet (it was disruptive then, and still is today) to turn away from continuations of the past and instead imagine the university of the future**.

As Dr García Lorda reminded us, our Faculty of Health Sciences is even younger. But far from being a weakness, this may well be its greatest strength: **with no links to traditional models, we can focus on thinking about the health of tomorrow**.



«Thinking about the health of tomorrow might be the best way to define the mission Dr Jadad's research has taken on.»

I don't see the pandemic of health that Dr Jadad has proposed for the future as simply a sea change or paradigm shift. I see it as having the potential to be an authentic revolution that breaks with the past, a revolution in terms of the relationship citizens (citizens who, at times, will be patients) have with their quality of life and well-being.

I see it as a revolution because it represents another step in the transition from the industrial society to the information society, as conceptualized by Manuel Castells in his trilogy *The Information Age*. The increasing empowerment of citizens in our society is leading to bottom-up movements. We can see this in the unstoppable growth of the sharing economy and we're beginning to see it in politics. We can clearly see it in health, in what's commonly known as e-health, and in the idea of the pandemic of health, which represents a great and irreversible leap forward.

Because it's not really about technology making relationships between citizens, patients, healthcare professionals and institutions more effective and efficient.

«Just like the UOC is not defined by its technology, but by the way it has developed the educational model; likewise we'll see how technology in e-health will develop the model, focusing on citizens and empowering them.»

No doubt this revolution taking us towards the information society will bring serious issues, problems and transgressions, as was the case with the industrial revolution, and as we can already see now. We are at the dawn of what many are calling the fourth industrial revolution, in fact just another step towards the information society.

But let me go a little further. I particularly like to think that, once we move from thinking in terms of illness to thinking in terms of health, the change is like moving from a reductionist approach to a comprehensive approach or, dare I say it, a holistic approach. And this is where technology is helping us again.



«Being able to model complex systems through artificial intelligence or machine learning will let us revolutionize science, as we move from reductionist approaches to systematic, comprehensive and holistic approaches.»

This will probably lead to us having a completely new vision of the world. At least that's what I'd like to see.

Thank you, Dr Jadad, for your colossal contribution to the evolution of scientific thought and, in particular, for playing such a leading role in our move towards the information age in the field of health.

Thank you very much. Dr Jadad!

Thank you very much!

We will close today's ceremony with a version of *Gaudeamus Igitur*, as we do at all such academic events. It is a version, however, that is very different to the traditional versions.

With the utmost respect and the highest musical and audiovisual standards, we have looked to make it our own; to make it UOC.

So, we close today's event with a version of *Gaudeamus Igitur* that is both solemn and festive.

Thank you, everyone.

Josep A. Planell