

# We´ll roWIN

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Dear Editor:

## Who are we?

Before starting this contribution, I would like to thank prof. Pérez-Turpin, whom I followed during my student days, and who many years later I met at a conference (blessed conferences that allow us to “*put a face*” to the quotations, models, and such exceptional works that are out there). That said, it is an honour for me that many years later we have met and you have trusted me to make my small contribution to this new challenge that is beginning: the edition of the magazine.

Physical Activity, Exercise and Cancer to whom I wish many years of life.

Furthermore, I am happy about the possibility that it gives me of not having to write a “*scientific*” article but rather being able to stop and think about the person or people... About the philosophy behind our work.

I remember my years at the Faculty in which we had to decide if Physical Education was Education and if it was Science, art or other disciplines.... Memories...

Life is a succession of events that mark the roadmap that we had predetermined. At that time, the person writing these words did not know that he was going to become a university professor, much less work with people with cancer... based on the phobia I have of hospitals...

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As I said, each one has a predetermined life plan, but which tends to be altered by different daily (and almost insignificant) events that make us take different alternatives until one day you find yourself in a place that you would never have dreamed of (or Yeah). The author of these lyrics became a “*university professor*” because of scoliosis. What a story!

So in my younger years, “*I grew more than necessary*”...“*little muscle for so much bone*.” Clinical judgment: Spinal deviation: scoliosis. Treatment: Swimming!!! And since then I entered a pool never to come out again. As the motto of Barcelona 92 said “*in life as in sport desire to improve*”. So I started swimming and swimming, swimming and swimming, (while I trained in Sports Sciences and Swimming) and ended up winning, on my own merits, an associate's place at the University. As modern coaches say, “*you never know when your life can change and if this change can be for the better or not. It is up to you to transform it and make it positive.*”

### Where are we going?

As I said before, life is a succession of events, and in this society in which we have had to live, cancer is the global pandemic and sooner or later, cancer appears in your life either because it comes to visit us or because it is in our loved ones.

Once it reaches us, we have to resign ourselves and accept it, but it should also make us think that with our training as Graduates or Graduates in CCAFD we can offer our “*grain of sand*”.

In my case, breast cancer hit an aunt and seeing how it changed her life made me think about how I could with my training (initial, at that time) improve this family member's condition.

Logically we are not doctors nor do we pretend to be, but I believe that from Sports Sciences we can do many things to improve physical condition but above all the quality of life (understood within this, mental health) given the possibility that sport offers and the physical activity of offering people moments of social relationship, of getting closer to a discipline, perhaps different to a different environment, to people whom, at the beginning of the activity, they did not know anyone but who, after a few weeks, they do feel identified.

This is the starting point of the research project that has occupied the last few years of my professional career, and almost of my life, because in the end, the projects are vocational and what begins as “*just work*” ends up being part of oneself.

We have called the research project “*Vence-remos*” in clear reference to overcoming the consequences of breast cancer in people who have gone through it. This is important, inasmuch as we have a series of women to whom life has, on the one hand, given them a new opportunity, or has turned them inside out like a sock: Cancer has stopped their approach to life, their troubles. everyday thoughts, their way of being in the world, their work, their family, their relationship with others...

At the time of diagnosis, “*After the “beep”, when you come to, everything automatically changes or at least your perception of everything, and everything goes to the background, because in the end, the first thing they have to do is heal themselves. The surgery is not especially complex (in some cases it is aggressive) but the path that begins after surgery is a large desert of chemotherapy sessions, radiotherapy sessions, of millions of tests to be able to know if they can continue with the treatment or You have to wait another week and they undermine the body, not only the physical part but also the psychological part of the person because you*

*also have to go through it alone and, in many cases, also draw strength from weakness to support your loved ones. (incomprehensible, but truer than you think)."*

Finally, the moment comes when the oncologist gives him the go-ahead and tells him that "for now" it seems that we can close the chapter and that life goes on... but in fact it is no longer the continuation of what we left "on standby." a few months ago. You have to live and rethink that life and that is where our project, *vence-remos*, appears, a project that aims to "live again", to enjoy what you have now!, not what you had before or what you will have tomorrow. We are no longer the same person who entered the operating room or the one who started the treatment, our body, our face and our spirit have changed, now we are a different person, with a different look, with a different scale of values, now what you want is to enjoy life and celebrate life.

### **What are *Vence-remos* keys?**

Currently *Vence-remos* has several women's groups in different parts of Andalusia and Galicia. Although we know that the flame has caught on and there are already groups of women who, through rowing, improve their physical condition, their perception of life and their health in other locations in Spain.

*Vence-remos* is a research project/physical activity program based on rowing adapted for women who have overcome breast cancer. *Vence-remos* is a social project in which women socialize with other people who have gone through precisely the "same path" that they have gone through, which is a project that mainly affects the quality of life. And for this it is important that these people who "have been alone" for so long, socialize with other people with the same pathology. In fact, it is the first thing we do, we propose activities and moments that allow socialization, that they know each other by name, that they know "the way of arrival."

There are people who come with conservation surgery, others who come with a total mastectomy, others with a radical mastectomy or even a double mastectomy. We have women who were diagnosed many years ago when much more aggressive surgeries were performed with grafts to the pectoral muscles from other muscles. Almost all of them have had part of the lymphatic chain removed from the arm of the affected breast. The majority have undergone various subsequent interventions. A large part have gone through a series of chemotherapy radiotherapy sessions, each one with different drugs, a duration, and a different periodicity. Here is a small example of what underlies breast cancer: A thousand different forms, a thousand different variants, and a thousand different people, each with their "unique" pathology and their personalized treatment.

Our first objective is for them to socialize and normalize their "illness". The vast majority of women who start the project have never seen "a paddle" in their lives. They have never been on a boat. And the first thing that surfaces is the fear of falling into the water. Look, what these women have lived with...! Maybe the fear you have now is the fear of falling into the water or the fear of not knowing how to row... That's wonderful...!

Previously, we have talked about the quality of life, the perception of health, the psychological part of a physical activity like rowing, a global sport because it brings a series of benefits, now we will see it. We have also talked about socialization. Now we would like to point to the place where this activity takes place. Rowing normally takes place in large sheets of water, usually calm waters or with little current. That is, a quiet "environment" that allows us to view a natural landscape, even within the city itself (in the case of some cities that have rowing clubs) rowing allows us to be in contact with nature, The possibility of being in the sun, with a pleasant temperature, listening to the noise of water, feeling the wind on your body, the feeling of freedom is something that few sports can match.

### **“You will never row alone”**

Little by little, through “*all being in the same boat*” the “*support group*” is formed, everyone is made to support each other, so that they go from being unknown to being “*the soul of that boat.*” which needs them all, and requires all of them, affirming a commitment between all of them, “*to row, you need the entire crew.*” In this way, they are all important, they are all necessary and they all row... in one way or another, someone cannot row, they do not have that much strength, it is not possible for them to row... so the solution is sought: from being a helmsman, to row only part, or row with less intensity, or not row at all... and the other rowers offer a ride to improve the spirit and strengthen the self-esteem of the partner.

The philosophy that underlies Vence-remos is a philosophy in which everyone contributes something, whether by rowing, or at the helm, by talking, by supporting, or by whatever. That is the essence of the project: “*You will never row alone*”.

In fact, the project is based on team boats, nothing individual, they are team boats, Vence-remos proposes a rowing adapted for women who have suffered breast cancer with which we have to adapt the physical appearance. To do this, we have chosen very, very, very stable boats because we are talking about people between the ages of 30 and 77, who are totally unaware or totally unaware of the discipline of rowing, a team sport with maximum rapport. Did you know that the coordination within a rowing crew is so great that they even breathe at the same time?

### **Competition, yes or no?**

Related to the first commandment: “*you will never row alone*” and what it entails: we are always together, we always participate, we always support each other, we are always there... so there are no teams, we are a family.

Vence-remos's approach is totally opposed to competition. We do not think that competition is bad, far from it, well-understood competition makes us improve ourselves, makes us grow...

But why compete and what do you have to prove when you have already won everything. These people have won a life, yes, a life... they already have all the medals! They have won a fight against cancer, they have won against a very harsh treatment.... So, why compete if we can enjoy them all?

Vence-remos is made up of support groups, closeness, unity, there is no room for competitiveness, when something is organized, meetings are held to enjoy the boats, the environment, the parties of another club, not to win. An African proverb states that “*if you want to get there quickly, walk alone. If you want to go far, go accompanied.*” This is another aspect of our philosophy, we want to create a school in other rowing clubs, in other cities,... in which support is given to women who have suffered breast cancer.

### **And, why rowing and not any other physical activity?**

Indeed it could be any other activity. Scientific literature is more than loaded with evidence about the convenience of different possibilities of physical activity, sports, etc.

Why have we considered rowing? Our research is based on what was started in early 2000 by Dr. McKenzie, a Canadian sports doctor, who, when no one “*prescribed*” physical activity (at that time, physical activity was

contraindicated for women with breast cancer). ) convinced a series of women to start paddling in a Canadian canoe.

These women led the way, inviting them to participate in a world dragon boat championship (a discipline similar to Canadian canoe paleo), but with a subtle difference: canoeing is not competitive, and dragon boating is.

Be that as it may, the impact of McKenzie's study and the participation in the World Championship of a boat with women who had suffered breast cancer was the spark that lit the fuse in many places around the world. Not in vain, breast cancer is the disease most diagnosed in the world.

Here is a "*small detail*": dragon boating is an exclusively competitive modality, that is, almost all of the people who practice it do so to compete. And competition, for this type of people, is not especially indicated... We imagine that McKenzie, when he encouraged those women in Canadian canoeing, what he intended was a more playful concept. Over the years, this Canadian canoe paleo has been transformed into dragon boat paleo and this discipline in itself has a competitive vocation.

On the other hand, if we look a little at the biomechanics of the Canadian canoe or the dragon boat, we see that it is a fairly asymmetrical exercise. In fact, canonists have always done compensation work precisely because of the asymmetrical movement. Furthermore, we found that there are different positions that, if not harmful, are contraindicated for women who have had breast surgery.

Our knowledge of canoeing (dragon boat) and rowing makes us opt for the latter since rowing is a much more global exercise with a much more defined kinetic chain in which one hundred percent of the body's muscles are used and in which we can isolate certain movements so that they are not harmful. In fact, we consider that rowing could be much better for women with this pathology. This is the starting hypothesis of the Vence-remos project, which, as we have mentioned, aims to improve physical condition and quality of life through the adapted practice of rowing in these women's lives.

Rowing is an exercise in which all the muscles of the body move, and thanks to a second-degree lever, we manage to overcome the resistance offered by the water. The mobile bench row not only moves the arms and back but also uses the lower body to a large extent. Furthermore, having such a defined motor pattern allows us to isolate the movement of the upper body and adapt the exercises that can be done to each person. And logically, after any physical activity program that is carried out with a certain rigor with a certain periodicity, we will achieve results without having to vary much in other aspects such as diet or hours of sleep. In our case, the improvements in physical condition we have demonstrated thanks to the Vence-remos program are: improvements in strength in both the upper body and the lower body. Strengthening flexibility in both the upper and lower body and with an exercise program of 2 sessions of 1:30 hours for 12 weeks we have achieved cardiac adaptations in these women. These cardiac improvements materialize in lowering the pulse at rest, and the basal pulse, and we have managed to have significant differences in both systolic and diastolic pressure, which is very encouraging in women whose circulatory systems have been quite massacred due to chemotherapy treatments. . In short, to the improvements reviewed above, we add the fact that they have a much stronger, much healthier, much more powerful heart and reducing blood pressure means that our expectations with this project are met.

**Keywords:** Physical exercise, Physical activity, Exercise, Cancer, Cancer prevention, Cancer treatments, Cancer survivors, Psychology, Sport medicine.

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