

Brazilian city mourns doctors killed in plane crash

Four doctors were killed in the crash of August 9 on the outskirts of São Paulo. Lise Alves reports from São Paulo.

The small town of Cascavel in southern Brazil is in mourning after the death of four doctors who died in a plane crash on Friday, August 9, on the outskirts of São Paulo city. The plane crashed in a residential area with 62 people aboard. There were no survivors.

Paediatrician and allergist Sarah Langer, aged 35 years, was a member of Paraná's Regional Council of Medicine (CRM-PR). Langer, along with doctors Arianne Risso, aged 34 years, and Mariana Belim, aged 30 years, were on the plane, on their way to an oncology conference in Curitiba. "We are in shock. The situation is so delicate that no words seem adequate to truly express our feelings. Many have lost more than a colleague or acquaintance. Belim was my classmate; she had just gotten married and was finishing her oncology residency", Katuscia Fogaça, emergency doctor in one of Cascavel's triage facilities, told *The Lancet*.

Fogaça remembers Langer as a doctor who cared deeply for the many children being sent from triage centres and public clinics to

the paediatric intensive care unit at Western Paraná State University Hospital, where she worked. "I never heard her complain. She'd always say 'the child really needs to come, you can send them'", she said.

Lucien Lucchesi, Residency Coordinator at the Cascavel Cancer Hospital (UOPPECAN), oversaw the two doctors, Belim and Risso, who were specialising in oncology. Lucchesi said that Belim had 6 months left to finish her 3-year course to become an oncologist specialist, whereas Risso had a year and a half left to become an oncologist.

"In addition to being very competent and committed doctors, each in their own way knew how to take very good care of cancer patients. It's one thing to treat a person and prescribe a medication, it's another thing to know how to care for and understand the patient", he told *The Lancet*.

UOPPECAN is a reference centre for oncology in the state and many of the patients come from other parts of Paraná and Brazil to be treated at

the facility. According to Lucchesi, the two doctors saw an average of 15–20 patients per day. They were always cheerful and had smiles on their faces. "This is something that makes all the difference for cancer treatment. It's very important", he said.

José Roberto Leonel Ferreira, aged 66 years, also died on the flight. He was a radiologist at the Cascavel Polyclinic Hospital and a retired Professor from the Western Paraná State University. He was going to São Paulo to see his son and meet his 2-month-old grandson.

At first, news accounts said 12 doctors were on board, but due to a flight cancellation, many decided to go by car and others decided on other connecting cities. Throughout the week, tributes from Brazilian medical entities were posted. "Paraná's Medical Council is in mourning for the tragic loss of so many fellow doctors, who were on their way to yet another professional development activity", wrote CRM-PR President, Romualdo José Ribeiro Gama.

"The tragic loss of these professionals leaves Brazilian medicine in mourning. Our members will continue to honour the legacy of those who left us so unexpectedly with their commitment to defending health and life", stated Brazil's Federal Council of Medicine.

The oncology conference scheduled to be held in Curitiba over the weekend was cancelled as a result of the crash. Promoted by the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, the event was supposed to discuss the practice of oncology in the public sector. Investigations as to what caused the crash are underway.

Lise Alves



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