

Philately as a mediator: the Parkinson's tulip on a Spanish commemorative stamp (2024)

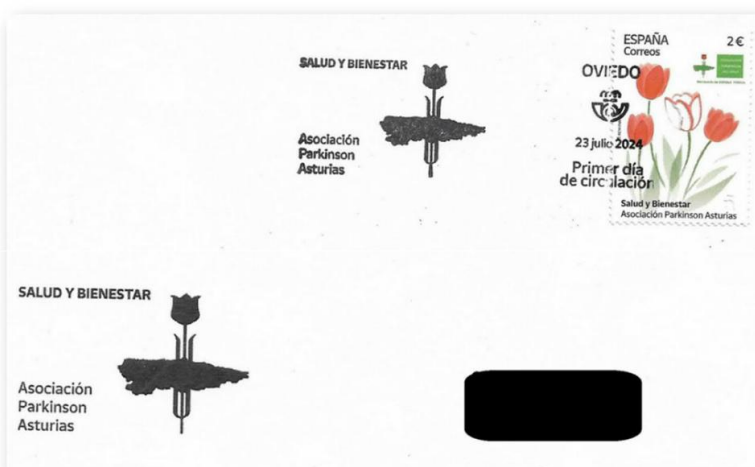


A powerful, symbol-rich motif

In the summer of 2024, the Spanish postal service Correos issued a commemorative stamp in honor of the Parkinson's Association of Asturias. The design features a stylized red tulip set against the outline map of the region—creating a graphic link between local engagement and international symbolism. Over the years, the tulip has become a globally recognized symbol of Parkinson's disease. The origin of this symbolism lies in a red-and-white striped tulip variety bred in the late 1970s by the Dutch horticulturist J. W. S. van der Wereld, who himself was affected by Parkinson's disease. He named the variety "Dr. James Parkinson" in honor of the British physician who first systematically described the disease in 1817. In 2005, the tulip was officially recognized as the symbol of the global Parkinson's community at the World Parkinson Conference in Luxembourg. Since then, it has represented not only the disease itself, but also hope, perseverance, and ongoing efforts to raise awareness.

Design with depth: the tulip as a visual carrier

A striking design feature of the Spanish stamp is the die-cut central petal. Once the stamp is affixed, the cut-out reveals the color of the underlying surface—such as that of the envelope. In this way, the stamp becomes an interactive design element: the motif changes depending on the medium to which it is attached, subtly alluding to themes such as change, adaptation, and visibility. The symbolism is thus conveyed not only graphically but also materially—an example of the strength of philatelic design when content and technique are brought together.



In terms of content as well, the tulip is a multi-layered motif. Its three petals are often interpreted symbolically as representing the three central pillars of Parkinson's work: awareness, research, and advocacy. Beyond this, the tulip's posture can also be read metaphorically: an unsupported tulip tends to bend forward—much like people with Parkinson's disease may develop an increasing forward stoop (postural instability) as the condition progresses. Today, this change can be effectively addressed therapeutically, particularly through targeted movement and physiotherapy.

¹ Despite an intensive search, I have never yet come across this tulip for sale; it truly appears to be a rarity.

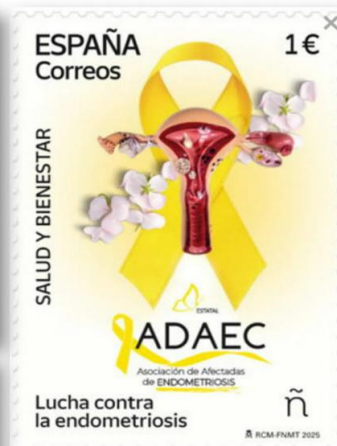
Rendering social engagement visible

The stamp brings these symbolic layers together with a regional reference to the Parkinson Asturias Association. It combines the organization's logo with the tulip and the outline of the region, thereby pointing to the work of a network that has supported people with Parkinson's disease and their families in northern Spain for 25 years—through medical care, rehabilitation, social support, and public awareness activities.

From a philatelic perspective, this issue is a successful example of how postage stamps can convey socially relevant themes. Through reduced yet precise symbolism, it communicates complex content within a very small space—not in a dramatic manner, but with restraint and deliberation. The die-cut petal in particular lends the stamp a distinctive visual identity and sets it apart from the multitude of thematic issues. In thematic collections focusing on medicine, social history, or floral symbolism, it thus represents a valuable exhibit.

A place in the 'Salud y Bienestar' series

The Parkinson stamp was issued within the context of the Spanish stamp series 'Salud y Bienestar' (Health and Well-Being). Since 2021, this series has been dedicated to health-related and socio-medical themes—usually conveyed through clear visual messaging and a strong socio-political dimension.



Previous issues in the series:

- 2021 – „Vivir es Urgente“ („Live is urgent“)
- 2022 – „VIH. Indetectable = intransmisible (HIV: Not detectable = Not transmissible)
- 2023 – „024 – Día Mundial de la Salud Mental“ (World Mental Health Day)
- 2025 – „Lucha contra la-Endometriosis“ (Fight against Endometriosis)

Within this context, the Parkinson stamp (2024) stands out in particular: it is one of the few issues that is not officially listed as part of the series, but is instead formally classified under 'Efemérides' (commemorative days).

In terms of both content and design, however, it fits seamlessly into the concept of Salud y Bienestar: making socially relevant health issues visible through clear symbolism and thoughtful design. Its combination of regional rootedness, medical relevance, and interactive design gives it a distinctive position within this group of issues.

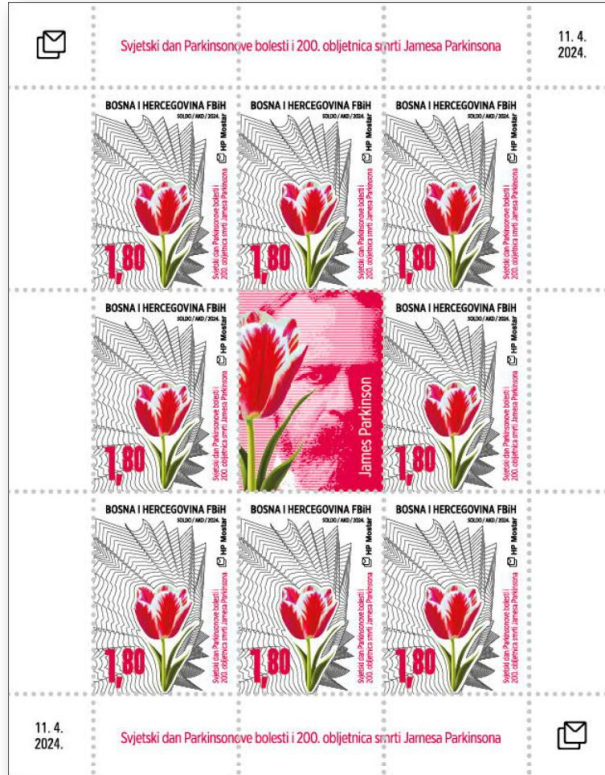
International connections: a note from Croatia.

In other countries as well, Parkinson's disease was addressed philatelicly in 2024. In the same year, the Croatian Post Mostar issued a commemorative stamp for World Parkinson's Day (11 April), which also features a tulip—this time set against a net-like background. This background is not officially explained, but it can be interpreted as a symbol of the complexity of the disease and the global interconnectedness of the Parkinson's community. Symptoms, causes, and therapeutic approaches form a dense network—just like the actors from medicine,



Research and self-help. This stamp, too, brings the topic into the public sphere—using its own stylistic means.

A name without postage stamp: James Parkinson



It is noteworthy that James Parkinson himself has never been depicted on an official postage stamp—despite the fact that his name is globally associated with one of the most common neurodegenerative diseases. To date, his portrait appears officially only on the stamp sheet of the Croatian issue for World Parkinson’s Day 2024, but not on the actual postage stamp itself. In addition, there are several personalized stamps from Ukraine bearing his image; however, these are not considered regular postal issues. By contrast, Jean-Martin Charcot—the French neurologist who further developed Parkinson’s work in the 19th century and coined the term ‘Morbus Parkinson’ in honor of the original describer—has been philatelically honored.

Charcot was a pioneer of clinical neurology and is regarded as the founder of the modern neurological school in France.

In a nutshell

This postage stamp exemplifies the potential of philately when it goes beyond being merely a means of postage.

It brings together medical symbolism, social engagement, and design innovation in a very small space. Particularly within the context of the *Salud y Bienestar* series, it occupies a distinctive position thanks to its regional grounding and the subtle depth of its design—serving both as a contribution to public awareness and as a collectible document of lived health culture.

