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Obituary

In memory of Vito Pistoia (1949–2018)



On September 11, 2018, our dear friend Vito Pistoia passed away in his family environment in Genoa after a rapidly evolving nephropathy. Everybody, who has known Vito, is shocked about this sad news, telling what strong and widely respected personality Vito is regarded as.

Vito received his MD degree cum laude in 1973. He achieved three specializations, namely Clinical and Experimental Hematology, Allergology and Clinical Immunology, and Rheumatology. After working as an assistant at the Immunology Laboratories, University of Genoa, and subsequently at the Institute for Cancer Research, he spent several months at the University of Alabama collaborating with Max Cooper and colleagues. In the early 90s, Vito became Director of the Oncology Laboratories at Gaslini Institute and held this position for over 23 years. One of us, Lorenzo, had the fortune to be the Scientific Director of Gaslini in those happy years and to strengthen his friendship with Vito. Vito greatly contributed to the research renaissance of the Gaslini Institute, actually, his group was one of the best and most productive.

Vito was clearly an extraordinary person. He had an in-depth knowledge of basic and applied immunology as well as onco-hematology and, medicine in general, which is rare to find. However, he never made a sensation out of his skills; in contrast, understatement, friendly behavior, profound kindness and smiling were the major characteristics of this unforgettable person and scientist. Therefore, everybody loved Vito: from the young coworkers to the top level scientists.

Vito was well known as top researcher by the international scientific community and, thus, was frequently invited as a speaker or chairperson at international congresses. He made major contributions to the Italian Immunological Society (SIICA), as a Member of the Board of

Directors, as well as to the European Federation of Immunology Societies (EFIS), primarily as the Editor-in-Chief of Immunology Letters, an EFIS-associated Journal. Based on his nature, he was also an efficient and particularly fair reviewer of manuscripts and grant applications.

In 2015, when Lorenzo decided to leave his position as Scientific Director of the Gaslini Institute and Professor of General Pathology and Immunology at the University of Genoa to start a new adventure in Rome at the Bambino Gesù Children Hospital, Vito expressed the desire to join him. In October 2016, Vito started his own research team in Rome while maintaining excellent relationships with his former coworkers in Genoa. He was extremely happy about this new opportunity and adventure, and he communicated his good mood several times to us, his friends and colleagues. The excellent environment inspired him to continue his highly innovative and productive research, greatly contributing to the growth of immunology at Bambino Gesù.

Unfortunately, approximately one year ago, a mild and well-controlled nephropathy rapidly got worse. After an additional six months, renal dialysis became strictly necessary. Despite intensive therapy and renal dialysis, he successfully continued his research activity, planned projects, wrote papers and guided his coworkers. As he was on the national list of patients in need of kidney transplantation, he did not lose his positive attitude.

In early August, while spending a couple of weeks' vacations in the mountains, he called Lorenzo saying "I feel much better now, the appetite is returning, I will be back in Rome pretty soon!" Unfortunately, an unpredictable cerebral edema took his life before he was to have scheduled kidney transplantation.

Now we are mourning his premature loss and we badly miss his scientific insight, kindness and humanity; however, we must be aware that it has been a privilege for us to share with Vito a great passion for science and a strong friendship for many years along the path of our lives. Because Vito was such a great person, the memory on him will be securely saved in us, in his many friends and in the scientific community, thus partially filling the gap his death released.

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