

Prof. Alessandro Pileri

An enthusiastic pioneer of modern Hematology

“An enthusiastic doctor” - this was the most appropriate definition of Prof. Alessandro Pileri by his son Claudio during the funeral speech.

This is also the sentiment shared by all the doctors who had the chance to meet him during his long and distinguished career: an enthusiastic physician deeply passionate about medicine and science.

He was used to say: “*There is no good medicine without good research*”, but also to remind everyone that science is not cost-free and requires efforts and dedication: “*You must invest a lot to achieve even a small result; if you invest peanuts, you will get nothing*”.

Prof. Pileri was born in 1928 in Ancona and graduated with honors in Rome. He then moved to Torino, at the Institute directed by Giulio Cesare Dogliotti, which at that time was a national reference center and a breeding ground of new talents in clinical and scientific research. Pileri then had a 2-year period of professional advancement as a post-doc in Brussels, at the Institute directed by Jean Brachet, a pioneer in RNA studies. Upon his return, he collaborated with another young man, Felice Gavosto, in a number of research projects. Both, having gained valuable experience abroad, took advantage of a cutting-edge reagent at the time: tritiated thymidine. Thanks to thymidine, they could challenge the traditional theories about the kinetics of leukemic cells. Together with other passionate doctors, including Vilma Gabutti, Gianluca Pagliardi, Gigi Pegoraro, Piero Masera, Prof. Pileri discovered that the leukemic very fast growth was characterized by a low proliferation, but by a massive recruitment into the cell cycle. These groundbreaking findings led to several publications in leading journals like Nature.

In the 1970's, Prof. Pileri had the foresight to recognize that Hematology had already grown to the point that it had to be an independent branch of medicine. This vision makes Prof. Pileri a founder of modern Hematology not only in Italy, but worldwide. It was from this

moment that it became clear that specific clinical units were needed to take care of patients with hematological diseases. He thus became one of the first university professors of Hematology, forming a distinguished trio with Franco Mandelli and Sante Tura, three brilliant clinicians and investigators who were widely considered the founders of Italian Hematology. After pioneering and productive years at the Dogliotti Institute, Prof. Pileri created and directed the University Division of Hematology in the early 1980s, which, over the years, thrived as both a structure and as a clinical & research center. Early studies on cell kinetics were thus applied to Multiple Myeloma, marking the beginning of a long series of critical achievements that made the University Hematology of Turin a global reference center in the field of Multiple Myeloma. Of note, he was a pioneer in the use of mobilized autologous stem cells, enabling the widespread use of intensified treatments with auto-transplantation in Myeloma, a procedure still used all over the world.

Under Prof. Pileri's leadership, post-graduate hematological schools, PhD programs and other programs were established, allowing hundreds of young doctors to be trained and charmed by the exciting combination of translational and clinical research. A peculiar gift was his ability to engage young doctors with great interest and curiosity, without

prejudice, but always valuing their ideas and respecting the novelty and enthusiasm they could bring. This nurturing environment offered several doctors the opportunity to receive exceptional scientific training, and many of them now hold leadership positions in Hematology Departments in Italy and globally. The list of hematology specialists trained at the Hematology of the University of Torino over nearly three decades is too long to mention.

Prof. Pileri's unwavering commitment to research was the reason and the fuel of his long career: he served as vice dean at the University of Torino, he was then President of the Italian Society of Hematology, finally he acted as President of the local Ethical Committee until

the age of 90. The New England Journal of Medicine and Blood Journal were his preferred reading until the very last days.

Finally, he was not only a visionary, but also a gentle and inspiring mentor. It is rare to find someone who can guide young researchers, influencing the direction of their career while leaving them the freedom to choose their own path. This is probably the reason why several people who trained in Torino have gone on to unique and successful careers. And this is also why so many doctors consider Prof. Pileri not only a founder of modern Hematology, but also a passionate influencer of several hematologist generations.

On behalf of all the colleagues of his School of Hematology at the University of Turin:

Prof. Mario Boccardo

Prof. Paolo Corradini

Prof. Massimo Massaia

Prof. Corrado Tarella



Prof. Alessandro Pileri
*one of the masters and founding fathers of
Italian haematology.*