

In memory of a great surgeon: Valerio Di Carlo (1938–2020)

Fulvio Calise¹ · Francesco Basile² on behalf of the Italian Community of Surgeons

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He is no longer among us. The Italian Surgical Community has lost one of its best sons, because of this tragedy that is hitting our civilized world.

A world-renowned surgeon, Prof. Valerio Di Carlo started his career in the Emergency Surgery Department of the Policlinico in Milan under the mentorship of Prof. Vittorio Staudacher. In 1978, he became Professor of Surgery at the Vita-Salute University of San Raffaele and was responsible for the General Surgery Department from 1980 to 2010.

His clinical activity encompassed every field of general surgery, but was mainly focused on pancreatic surgery.

In 1985, he performed the first combined pancreas–kidney transplantation in Italy and in 1989, the first pancreatic islet transplantation.

Under Prof. Di Carlo’s leadership, his group developed original surgical techniques in pancreatic surgery using duct occlusion by neoprene injection; another new technique focused on the application of intraoperative radiotherapy in pancreatic cancer. He was always interested in every type of innovation: he was a pioneer in nutrition in surgery, in the application of ERAS protocols, in recognizing new opportunities such as laparoscopy, and in the introduction of new technologies ranging from radioimmuno-guided surgery to the first videos of surgical procedures.

He was one of the first clinicians to understand the importance of translational research; he founded and directed a Laboratory of Experimental Surgery, and in 2005 he promoted—for the first time in Italy—the model of a Pancreas Unit: basic scientists, clinicians and surgeons working together.

Prof. Di Carlo was an appreciated Member and President of countless Scientific Societies. He published more than 400 papers in peer-reviewed journals as well as countless book chapters.

In 1998, he was named “Cavaliere di Gran Croce al merito della Repubblica” for his transplant activity in diabetic patients, and thanks to his remarkable support, San Raffaele Hospital has become one of the leading hospitals in Italy and within Europe that continues to focus on his surgical fields of interest.

Once retired in 2011, he became President of the Giulio Loretì Foundation, which is devoted to providing free social, educational and medical care to underserved communities. In 2017, he published a book entitled “The Soul of the Doctor” which reflected his lifestyle and how he was destined to be a doctor—always human and devoted to his patients.

Valerio Di Carlo leaves his wife Lucia, married for over 50 years, his three sons, Andrea, Cristina, and Stefano, and three beloved nephews. He had many interests other than medicine: art, music and all that is related to beauty. But his passion, his goal in life, was the care of his patients and

✉ Fulvio Calise
fulvio.calise@libero.it; fulvio.calise@icloud.com;
fulvio.calise@pinetagrande.it

¹ Responsabile UnitÀ Operativa Complessa di Chirurgia Epato-Bilio-Pancreatica, Pineta Grande Hospital, Via Domitiana km 30.000, CAP, 81030 Castel Volturno, CE, Italy

² Department of Ospedale Vittorio Emanuele, Clinica Chirurgica, Catania, Italy

the education of his fellows. He has influenced hundreds of young and senior doctors in Italy. He transmitted to them his acute clinical judgement, his unreachable technical ability and bravery, and most of all, the use of heart to really become a doctor. He always supported the clinical and scientific value of people and thanks to his teachings, several of his fellows achieved important clinical and academic roles. They will spread his endless love and dedication to the cause

of medicine; his legacy will remain and forever influence the field of surgery.

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