Obituary

Antonio Ascenzi, M.D. (1915–2000)

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When Antonio Ascenzi, M.D., passed away, he was an active Emeritus Professor of Morbid Anatomy and President of the Institute of Paleopathology at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”. He was a valued teacher, contributor to the fields of morbid anatomy, calcified tissues, biomechanics, anthropology and paleopathology, member of editorial boards and academies, and recipient of various prizes. Throughout his long career, the scientific community saw him as a pioneer researcher, who investigated fundamental issues with courageous, novel and sound approaches, often requiring sustained dedication and patience. Other researchers sought his advice because of his broad knowledge and depth of thought. His methodologies were respected for their appropriateness, rigor, responsiveness to complexity, and time commitment. His experimental results were consistently viewed as clear, unique, and enlightening. In the field of calcified tissues, he was among the first to appreciate the fundamental nature of the properties of the organic and inorganic phases and their relations. He investigated such relations and the causes for their differences in various types of human and non-human tissues, such as primary, osteonic, fetal membranous, membranous and medullary bone in relation to their degree of mineralization. He re-

searched adult compact bone micro- and macro-structural properties in terms of the ultrastructural properties, finding a key to bone anisotropy. Through microstructure isolation, he was able to hypothesize a correlation among osteons’ mechanical properties, mineralization degree, and patterns of collagen fibril orientations. Through studies of long bone shaft sections, he hypothesized the local correspondence throughout the shaft between the fibrils’ predominant direction and mechanical needs.

His research achievements resulted from strong intuition, refined logic, and self-discipline. His introspective nature allowed him to acquire through the years the self-knowledge that he believed necessary for the investigator to make the best use of personal abilities and limitations and to become effective and efficient at the research process. He knew how to promote creativity, which he combined with a rigorous scientific method. He believed that for best results the research process should not be rushed. He believed that sound methodology and awareness of methodological limitations bring successful research in the long run, even though unexpected results may seem to create conflict in the short run. With deep consideration, he was open to scientific adventures.