

## Obituary

### Giulio Bertaccini

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Prof. Giulio Bertaccini, director of the Institute of Pharmacology at the University of Parma, Italy, died on April 15, at the age of 65.

He was born in Siena in 1932, but soon moved to Bari, where his father was professor of dermatology and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. Bertaccini qualified in Medicine at Bari University in 1956. After graduating, he left Bari and followed to Parma his teacher, Prof. Vittorio Erspamer, for whom he had the utmost admiration. At the Institute of Pharmacology in Parma his work was characterized by

extraordinary enthusiasm. Over the years he worked intensively together with Prof. Erspamer on comparative pharmacology and biochemistry, with particular regard to biogenic amines and peptides in invertebrates (molluscs) and lower vertebrates (amphibian skin). The result of this research was the identification, structure elucidation and pharmacological study of 17 new biogenic amines (among them 5-hydroxytryptamine, sulphated indolealkylamines, octopamine) and a variety of bioactive peptides belonging to different families: tachykinins, bradykinins and caeruleins. These studies, and that of caerulein in particular, fascinated Dr. Morton Grossman, the Editor of *Gastroenterology* at that time and future founder of C.U.R.E. in Los Angeles. A very productive scientific collaboration and a warm friendship developed at this time between the two scientists who were very similar in scientific integrity and character. Bertaccini visited the USA many times and became very well known internationally in the field of gastroenterology.

In 1967 Bertaccini was appointed director of the Institute of Pharmacology in Parma, when Prof. Erspamer moved to Rome. He went on studying peptides, like bombesin, but at the same time, he went back to biogenic amines and to histamine in particular, which became his main interest in the next 25 years. In collaboration with the Chemical Department of the Faculty of Pharmacy in Parma, he worked on methylated histamine pharmacology at the end of the 60s; he was in close contact with distinguished histaminologists such as Charlie Code and Sir James Black. After the discovery of histamine H<sub>2</sub> receptors by Black and coworkers in 1972, Bertaccini's group characterized H<sub>2</sub> receptor pharmacology in peripheral systems, with particular regard to the pharmacology of H<sub>2</sub> blockers in cardiovascular and gastrointestinal systems. With the discovery of histamine H<sub>3</sub> receptors in 1983, new enthusiasm pervaded all the histaminologists in the world. Prof. Schwartz attributed to Bertaccini's group the characterization of H<sub>3</sub> receptors in the GI tract and in the cardiovascular system. A special relationship, warm and very productive, started with Henk Timmerman, who became a friend. Many times they visited each other, planning for the future; Henk was in Parma last February and we spoke with enthusiasm about our ongoing

chapter on peripheral effects of H<sub>3</sub> receptors, which turned out to be Bertaccini's last work.

During his career Bertaccini published more than 400 original articles, several invited review articles and chapters for books. In 1982 he was the editor of a volume of the *Handbook of Experimental Pharmacology on Mediators and Drug in Gastrointestinal Motility*. He was a member of several international Editorial and Advisory Boards.

Giulio Bertaccini was a dedicated scientist, characterized by a very keen intelligence, an independent mind combined with a native caution and a deep sense of duty. His scientific integrity was applied to teaching, research, academic life, relationships with drug companies, colleagues and students and this was his greatest attribute for people who worked with him. He was an excellent teacher for more than 40 years. He combined a broad medical knowledge with a clear and incisive style and a fine sense of humour. All these characteristics made his lessons always very crowded and most students had great respect for him, in spite of his rigour during examinations. He was a stern but fair teacher.

He was a natural leader, imposing his authority by example and not by exhortation. A man of strong convictions, even if his points of view were unpopular, he would never turn aside from a line of action he considered correct. He expected high standards of those around him, but none more rigorous than those he demanded of himself.

Under a rather austere appearance he concealed a rich and warm personality. His insatiable search for knowledge was not quenched by medicine alone. Those who did not

know him very well, might have been surprised to learn of the many activities he practised with extraordinary enthusiasm and energy. He was a remarkably active man and age seemed to make no difference to his activity: he was a climber, a skier, an indefatigable hiker, a talented tennis player. He combined sport activities with other interests, which included classical music, reading, photography, travel and bridge. Most of all, he loved mountains and particularly the Dolomites that he knew very well, since he climbed most of them, either alone or with his eldest son. He loved classical music and literature; he was an avid reader and a fine art collector; his superb collection of modern art gave him particular pleasure. He was excellent company, humorous and very well informed. His love of life was infectious and his energy boundless.

Bertaccini was a man of great charm. His fascinating personality and courtesy will be remembered by his friends all over the world. He was a man with style and he will remain a totally unique and unforgettable person for all of us who loved him and mourn for him now. He is survived by his wife, two daughters, two sons and a sister.

I met Giulio Bertaccini when I was a student in 1973. Afterwards, I was an internal student and then an assistant of his, a colleague for many years, a co-author and at the end I became a friend. As all those who knew him very well, I felt a strong bond of affection coupled with deep respect for his strength of character, his sense of duty and fairness. I am very proud to have been his pupil and to continue his work.