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Gianfranco Rizzoni

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The sudden death of Gianfranco Rizzoni following a short but painful disease has deeply saddened those of us who knew him, first of all because it was impossible to meet Gianfranco without quickly feeling that you were one of his friends. His death has also distressed the world of pediatric nephrology, as he was an undisputed leader in this field.

Born in 1940 in Breno, a small town in the Italian Alps, not far from Brescia, Gianfranco obtained his medical degree in Pavia in 1964, graduated in pediatrics

at the University of Pavia in 1967 and in nephrology at the University of Padova in 1975. He spent 3 years in the pediatric nephrology ward of Professor Royer as a research fellow at the Necker Enfants Malades Hôpital in Paris and 1 year in the kidney transplantation branch at the children's hospital in Los Angeles. Starting his career in academic medicine in Padova as an assistant professor of pediatrics in 1973, he became associate professor in 1982. In 1987, he became director of the nephrology and dialysis division at the Bambino Gesù Research and Teaching Hospital in Rome, one of Italy's most famous medical institutions. He was not interested in honors or money but nevertheless had great ambitions for developing the areas he considered important for children with renal diseases. Indeed, he brought pediatric nephrology to *Roma*. Under his leadership, this division grew within a few years to become one of the largest units in Italy, with a staff of ten or so fully trained pediatric nephrologists. After great effort and thorough training of his staff, Gianfranco Rizzoni in 1993 succeeded in developing a very active program for renal transplantation and helped to promote the Italian national pediatric organ allocation system. His overall approach to children with renal disease also took into consideration psychological and social aspects. He founded the Association for the Treatment of Children with Renal Diseases, which provides financial and psychological support to many families, and promotes training and research.

Gianfranco rapidly became a leading figure in the Bambino Gesù hospital, where he served on several committees and where his advice and opinions were always sought and highly respected. His ability to manage clinical research led him to become, in 1996, the vice scientific director of the Bambino Gesù Children's Research Institute. In 2003, he was appointed head of the Institute's newly established department of nephro-urology. When he reached the age of 65 in January 2005, he was exceptionally asked to delay retirement and to continue his work.

Until a short time before his death on June 1, 2005, he continued to work hard in the Institute, with three ob-

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jectives: to insure the best standard of care for his patients, to promote clinical and basic research in pediatric nephrology, and to insure a high quality of training for the many residents in pediatrics and nephrology who came to his unit every year. He was without question a major force at the Bambino Gesù Ospedale, where he was deeply respected and loved.

After Gianfranco moved to Rome, his unit quickly attained international recognition through a number of clinical research works. His scientific interests spanned a wide range of aspects of acute and chronic renal diseases in children. He was the first to draw attention to a new entity: the hypoplastic kidney with glomerular cysts. He was particularly interested in Alport syndrome and other genetically transmitted diseases such as cystinuria and cystinosis, for which his contribution includes several original publications. He performed several studies on the hemolytic uremic syndrome and with a dedicated group described its epidemiology in Italy. Chronic peritoneal dialysis and kidney transplantation were two more fields in which he and his team published interesting works.

President of the Italian Society for Paediatric Nephrology from 1992–1994, he served as a council member of the European Society for Paediatric Nephrology and of the International Paediatric Nephrology Association. He was a prominent personality in these societies, known for the quality of his interventions, the rigor and accuracy of his analysis, and the appropriateness of his criticisms.

In 1983, he was admitted as one of the pediatric members of the EDTA registry, where he accomplished tremendous work until 1991. Participants in the ESPN

congress in Rome in 1990 and the first IPTA meeting in Venice in 2000 are unlikely to forget the exceptional quality of these events. As always, after accepting to serve as the organizing president of these meetings, Gianfranco organized and inspected every minor detail and worked with all his energy to insure the success of these meetings.

Gianfranco Rizzoni had an engaging personality, natural kindness and a wonderful sense of humor. Open to other people and cultures, his many interests and passions extended to the worlds of art, music and literature. As a young man, he was a proficient alpinist, able to climb the “Grandes Jorasses,” and whenever he had time, he would return to his mountains, where he had set up a small home with his wife. He loved skiing and each winter would accompany a group of transplanted children for their winter holidays, to be their physician and to encourage them on the slopes.

Gianfranco embraced life in a contagious way. When he became severely ill and knew that the end was near, he accepted his disease with impressive courage and fortitude, giving his friends and relatives another example of the nobility of his soul. His death is an irremediable loss for his family, for all those who were fortunate to work with him, and for the entire community of pediatric nephrology. We would like to address our deepest sympathy to his wife, Titiana, who was extremely close to him and undoubtedly a fundamental part of Gianfranco’s success in his service for sick children.