Luigi Pagliaro, 1931–2020: in memoriam

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Luigi Pagliaro, Emeritus Professor of Internal Medicine at the School of Medicine in Palermo, a father of Italian Internal Medicine and an internationally renowned hepatologist, passed away on September 7, 2020 after a brief illness, at the age of 89. He is survived by his wife Enza, his daughter Laura, and his son Antonio.

Professor Pagliaro was well known for his contributions as a researcher and clinical epidemiologist of Internal Medicine and Hepatology, but he will be best remembered for his commitment to teaching and compassion for his patients which made him a shining example for generations of doctors.

For all of us who worked closely with him and for those with whom he collaborated in Italy and around the world, Luigi Pagliaro will be appropriately remembered as a person of profound vision and deep principles. Throughout his career, he remained focused on his desire to change the field of Internal Medicine and Hepatology to better serve his patients. He adhered to the highest principles as it pertained to scientific methodology along with personal and professional ethics. Words cannot capture the legacy he leaves

behind after decades of devotion to teaching, training and research.

A student of Aldo Turchetti, he began his career in the late fifties at the Policlinico University Hospital in Palermo, Italy. Early on and while working with a rural population in Sicily, at a time when the etiology of cirrhosis was believed to be due exclusively to alcohol abuse, he was one of the first researchers to discover the proclivity of viral hepatitis to progress from the acute phase of the disease to a chronic form of liver disease.

In 1973, Luigi Pagliaro became the Director of Internal Medicine of the Cervello Hospital. During his tenure, he oversaw an ambitious project to establish a second university center by growing a small community sanatorium into a highly specialized health institution. As a result of his success, he was promoted to the Chair of Medical Semiotics, then Medical Pathology and finally to the Medical Clinic where he led the group until 2003. Throughout this period, Luigi Pagliaro combined his passion for education, research and clinical care into daily practice which he passed on to the physicians he trained in areas including portal hypertension, hepatocellular carcinoma, chronic viral hepatitis and chronic liver disease. He remained convinced throughout his career that the patient always came first and the best clinical research was performed in the hospital setting; an extremely innovative idea in the 1970's. Over time, he curated the “Cervello Old Boys” who were his faithful students that later became national and international leaders in the field themselves.

A salient feature of his activity as a physician and as Professor of Clinical Medicine was his absolute dedication to the patient, which led him, among other things, to refuse any form of private funding. Luigi Pagliaro has always been involved in the battles for the democratization of healthcare and for a privileged relationship between academic and hospital healthcare with general practitioners. In the eighties he was among the champions of the establishment of the regional transplant center, ISMETT, a reality of international collaboration he considered essential to contain medical migration away from Sicily. He was a founding member of

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the Associazione Italiana per lo Studio del Fegato (AISF) and of the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) and an active contributor to the activities of the Società Italiana di Medicina Interna (SIMI), particularly in the field of postgraduate teaching.

Appointed Professor Emeritus of University of Palermo immediately after his retirement in 2004, Luigi Pagliaro remained active in the field of research and teaching, focusing on clinical methodology, the doctor-patient relationship and bioethics. In recent years, he was President of the Regional Bioethics Committee. Until the end of his life, he continued teaching and writing about the importance of the physician–patient relationship.

As testified by many doctors and countless patients, Professor Pagliaro was a special person, notable for his great vision, professional merits and for his great capacity for empathy. He was impervious to all possible contaminations of Medicine, both at a clinical and at a research level, with commercial and marketing interests. As such, his role in the CUF (Commissione Unica del Farmaco) between 1997 and 2002 was instrumental in bringing the canon of evidence-based medicine, his most recurrent mantra, to a practical and widespread application in the registration and regulation of the use of old and new drugs was of paramount importance. Many of his career choices, which appeared in contrast to trends in academic medicine sometimes resulted in his not being recognized for his outstanding achievements in education and research. Later, his work was validated by the developments and improvements generated by his contributions. The testimony of his professional merits is contained in his academic heritage, a hepatological school in Palermo of internationally recognized scientific and clinical value.

Although invariably charming and polite in company, he was not an easy person to get to know well. He may have been shy and he was certainly selective about showing his sense of humour and his affection. His softer side was most obvious when he was in the company of his family, particularly his grandchildren. Indisputably, he is held in deep affection by the many whose lives he touched.

Luigi Pagliaro has been many things to many people: physician, scientist, teacher, mentor, role model, negotiator but above all, it was his straightforwardness, authority, enormous intellect and clear-sightedness that won over so many of his colleagues and patients. Even though he has now left us, we are indebted to him for the legacy he created which will live in the future generations of physicians.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

Statement of human and animal rights This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent For this type of study, formal consent is not required.

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