

Obituary: ALBERTO MALLIANI (11.09.35 - 15.10.06)

Professor Alberto Malliani was born on September 11, 1935 in Italy. He graduated in medicine at the University of Sienna in 1959, became an Internist and rapidly embarked on an academic career. He had a passion for research, and attracted by the famous North American research centres, he worked as a fellow at Columbia University from 1965 to 1967. He later pursued his contacts in the US as visiting professor at the universities of Utah and Texas before becoming Professor of Medicine at the University of Milan and head of the Internal Medicine Department at the L.Sacco Hospital in Milan.

Prof. Malliani published widely with more than 200 full length papers in prestigious journals and in textbooks such as Handbook of Physiology and Textbook of Pain. He had Editorials published in Circulation, American Heart Journal, British Heart Journal, Cardiovascular Research and undertook numerous Reviews. He acted regularly as a Referee for Circulation, Lancet, Circulation Research, American Journal of Physiology, Journal of Applied Physiology, Journal of Autonomic Neuroscience, British Heart Journal, Heart, European Heart Journal, Brain Research, Behavioral and Brain Sciences, and the National Science Research Foundation.

The largest part of his research activity was carried out in the area of neural regulation of cardiovascular function. He investigated new types of excitatory reflexes mediated by cardiovascular sympathetic afferent fibres and studied the neural mechanisms occurring during myocardial ischemia, hypertension and congestive heart failure, implicating these excitatory reflexes in the neural mechanisms of cardiac sudden death. This led him to develop a new hypothesis on peripheral mechanisms for cardiac nociception. In 1982 by studying the frequency domains of various cardiovascular signals he showed that it is possible obtain valuable markers of sympatho-vagal balance using this approach. He summarized his 40 years of research in a book "Principles of cardiovascular neural regulation in health and disease", published in 2000 (Kluwer Acad Publ).

Although a distinguished clinical scientist, he will be remembered by all who knew him as a man with a deep commitment to his fellow man. In the clinical field he had a particular interest in the care of patients with social difficulties, reflecting his central concern for the human elements of medical care. He was the Secretary of the Italian affiliation of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) when this organization received in 1985 the Nobel Peace Prize. He was a co-founder and President of the Scientific Committee of VIDAS (Volontari Italiani Domiciliari per l'Assistenza ai Sofferenti) - a voluntary association for assisting terminal cancer patients which has provided care for several hundreds patients per year since it was founded in 1984.

Alberto Malliani was a passionate and tenacious advocate of Internal Medicine in Italy, through his activities, publications and as president of many congresses. He became president of the Italian Society of Internal Medicine in 2002. He joined the Administrative Council of EFIM as delegate of Italy in 1999, and his commitment and the clarity of his judgments were soon recognized by all. His activities inside our Federation have been various and considerable. He was a regular contributor to the European School of Internal Medicine in Alicante, and became the coordinator of the EFIM working group on ethics.

In 1999, he was chosen by the Executive Board to be part of the European team that developed the Charter on Medical Professionalism in collaboration with the American College of Physicians and the American Board of Internal Medicine. Alberto Malliani brought an inspired input on several major issues and particularly on the topic of conflicts of interest. His approach was based on an absolute trust on the values of both evidenced based medical knowledge and of honesty and generosity. After the publication of the Charter in 2002 in the Lancet and in the Annals of Internal Medicine, Alberto's task was only beginning. He continued assiduously to promote the Charter in Italy, and managed to capture the interest not only of the entire medical community but, thanks to his qualities as communicator, reached the general public through the Italian media. He continued these interests with a leading role in the Alliance Project with ACP/ABIM in which the Working Group explored the relationship between Medicine and Society.

Alberto Malliani became President-elect of EFIM in 2003, and in 2004 he was proposed and accepted as a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (London). Later that year, he was struck by a terrible disease. He never complained but accepted with courage to fight it. His trust in Medicine was sincere but lucid. Neither operations nor chemotherapy could keep him for long away from his work at the hospital or in his Laboratory. During the EFIM 5 congress in Paris in September 2005, he announced with remarkable dignity that he would be unable to take up the position as President of the Federation because of his concerns about his future and the effect it might have on the Federation. He was awarded the position of Honorary President and remained till his last days an active advisor on the Executive Committee.

With the untimely death of Alberto Malliani, Internal Medicine has lost an inspired and passionate advocate. We have lost a brilliant and generous colleague, and more than that: a friend. To Signora Annina Malliani, to his family, his friends, his collaborators, we wish to express our deep sadness and sympathy.

Daniel Sereni
EFIM Past President

Chris Davidson
EFIM Vice President