



Acute myeloid leukemia

## Prof. Francesco Lo Coco: October 30, 1955–March 3, 2019

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Francesco Lo Coco was born in Palermo where his early schooling took place. He attended Medical School in Pisa. In 1981, Francesco moved to La Sapienza University of Rome to become fellow at the Hematology Institute directed by Prof. Franco Mandelli. In 1992, he was a visiting researcher at the Institute for Cancer Genetics of the Columbia University in New York directed by Prof. Riccardo Dalla Favera, who remained a dear colleague and friend.

Returning to Italy in 1994, Francesco started an intense collaboration with Prof. Piergiuseppe Pelicci. Together, they described the molecular biology of the *PML-RARA* rearrangement in acute promyelocytic leukaemia (APL). This provided a basis for the modern treatment of the disease. Profs Giuseppe Avvisati in Italy, Miguel Sanz of the Spanish Pethema group, Uwe Platzbecker of the German Intergroup, and several other colleagues around the world have been his faithful and friendly fellow travelers on the long journey to the cure of APL. The clinical, multi-centre randomized study promoted by the Italian GIMEMA group

and published on the *New England Journal Medicine* in 2013 showing APL could be cured with retinoic acid and arsenic trioxide without chemotherapy is a milestone. Francesco has been the “spiritus rector” for this remarkable European initiative which paved the way for a pan-EU trial in high-risk APL, which is currently recruiting patients in Italy, France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, and Spain. Francesco always smiled when he spoke about the “APOLLO” trial, and it made us all proud and happy to work with him on this endeavor.

Since 2005, together with Prof. Sergio Amadori and myself, Francesco has been the professor of hematology at Tor Vergata University in Rome, where he led the laboratory of Onco-Hematology and funded a research group, which progressively grew over the years. Despite many logistical difficulties, but assisted by his devoted collaborators, in particular Maria Teresa Voso, he expressed an extraordinary planning capacity by standardizing the laboratory procedures and organizing a network for the genetic and molecular diagnosis of haematologic cancers.

Prof. Lo Coco held numerous prominent positions in national and international scientific societies: Società Italiana di Ematologia Sperimentale (SIES), Società Italiana di Ematologia (SIE), American Society of Hematology (ASH), Associazione Italiana contro le Leucemie (AIL), Gruppo Italiano Malattie Ematologiche Maligne dell’Adulto (GIMEMA), Associazione per la Ricerca sul Cancro (AIRC), and European Hematology Association (EHA). He was a member of several important editorial boards and published more than 400 papers in peer-review scientific journals, reaching an H-index of 96.

He received many national and international awards during his scientific career including the International Prize G. Di Guglielmo from the “Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei” in 1992, the Commendatore al Merito della Repubblica Italiana in 2013, the European Sapio Award in 2014, the Tata Memorial Center Oration in 2015, the G. Venosta Award by Associazione Italiana Ricerca sul Cancro (AIRC) in 2016, the P. Stryckmans Memorial Lecture by the

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Belgian Society of Hematology in 2017 and the “José Carreras Award” from the EHA in 2018.

Francesco, a person of unusual sensitivity and culture, keen on music and opera, was also particularly charming and likeable when singing accompanied by the sound of his guitar. Sicily and the North of Spain with Castro-Urdiales, his beloved village and the sea of Cantabro region were his origins, to which he always returned.

Wonderful mentor for many physicians and biologists, he was greatly beloved by his collaborators for his equity and capacity to be close to the individual attitudes and needs in everyday life. Meeting Francesco every morning at our Hematology Institute was a joy. We spent about 40 years of

our life together and he designated me godfather of his son Gaetano, an accomplished musician and orchestra conductor.

Persons like Francesco Lo Coco are rare which makes his loss difficult to bear. We are stricken with deep grief, difficult to overcome.

### **Compliance with ethical standards**

**Conflict of interest** The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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