

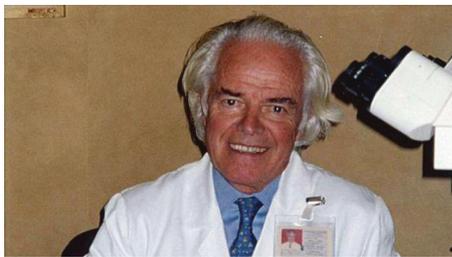


## Prof. Franco Mandelli: Leukaemia therapy pioneer

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Professor Franco Mandelli, died in Rome on 15 July 2018, age 87. He is considered a father of modern haematology in Italy and a major contributor to global progress in acute leukaemia therapy.



Franco Mandelli was born in Bergamo, studied medicine at the University of Milan and subsequently joined the School of Internal Medicine at the University of Parma led by Professor Michele Bufano. Soon thereafter Prof. Bufano invited Mandelli to move with him to Department of Internal Medicine at the Policlinico Umberto I of the University Sapienza Roma previously chaired by Prof. Giovanni Di Guglielmo. Curiously, there was no Department of Haematology at the University and Mandelli was encouraged to start one. *The rest is history.*

Soon thereafter Prof. Mandelli began his landmark work on therapy of the acute leukaemias. Cure of these diseases was considered hopeless at that time but Mandelli was encouraged by the work of American and French colleagues including Profs. Emil Frei, James Holland, Joseph Simone and Jean Bernard. He became a frequent visitor to Hospital Saint Louis in Paris to confer with Bernard.

During the 1970's, 80's and 90's, Professor Mandelli organised an international conference focused on acute

leukaemias held in Roma at the Cavalieri Hilton overlooking the city. His initial proposal for the congress met with skepticism; he topic too restrictive. Data too discouraging. However, these fears proved unfounded and the 1st conference in 1973 was attended by over 400 European and American leukaemia experts. Four meetings followed, the last, in 1991, attended by over 1000 delegates. RPG recalls arriving late for his presentation at one meeting. (Anyone trying to drive in Rome will sympathize.) We used Kodak slides then and I remember rushing to the meeting room and handing in my slide carousel. Franco forgave my lateness but unfortunately and unknown to me the cavernous conference hall used back projection such that every slide appeared in reverse from its normal orientation. Imagine trying to explain a survival curve going left-to-right instead of right-to-left. The visual impression one gets is dying increases survival. Probably at that early stage in my career it made little difference. Or perhaps my presentation was especially appreciated by colleagues with dyslexia or with a mirror.

In 1993, Prof. Mandelli also started the *International Symposium on Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia*, another Roman meeting that soon became a tradition. This was organised every 4 years until 2017 and was taken over by FLC for the past four editions. The last one was attended by more than 300 haematologists.

Among his pioneering activities Mandelli anticipated the need for studies conducted by large cooperative groups. In 1982 he founded the Italian multi-centre group GIMEMA (*Gruppo Italiano per le Malattie Ematologiche dell'Adulto*) and led it for many years. GIMEMA studies have produced many important advances in leukaemia therapy. International collaborators include the EORTC, PETHEMA (Spain) and the AMLSG and SAL (Germany) cooperative groups.

Professor Mandelli had a genuine interest for research and innovation in haematology and a straightforward, forthright personality. Above all, he was a superb physician who made patients the centre of his attention, efforts and research. Commemorating his death Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic, called Professor Mandelli:

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Amongst those who contributed to the improvement of our country.

The contributions of Prof. Mandelli live on through the careers and contributions of the many students he mentored during his long and extraordinary career and in the work of many international colleagues who benefitted from his wise

counsel. His shoes will be difficult to fill. We miss him (He will be missed).

### **Compliance with ethical standards**

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare no conflict of interest.