Paolo Bianco (1955-2015)

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In Memoriam

Paolo Bianco (1955-2015)

The stem cell community lost one of its most esteemed members when Paolo Bianco died on November 6th, 2015. Paolo was a Professor of Anatomic Pathology and Director of Stem Cell Lab at the Department of Molecular Medicine, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy.

Paolo spent his entire research life investigating the bone marrow skeletal stem cells, and studying their role in human skeletal diseases. Paolo will be remembered for his discovery of the in vivo location of skeletal stem cells and unequivocal demonstration of their ability for self-renewal. This landmark discovery provided a new perspective to many follow up studies investigating the interaction between hematopoietic stem cells and skeletal stem cells, a fertile area of investigation that will have important implications for the use of stem cells in therapy. His outstanding studies of fibrous dysplasia as a disease of skeletal stem cells opened up the field of using stem cells as disease models and for developing potential therapies that use stem cells as tools. In addition, he was a pioneer in developing approaches of relating discoveries employing skeletal pathologies of gene-modified mice to the human skeletal physiology. As a clinician scientist, Paolo was a courageous and untiring advocate for basing skeletal stem cell therapies on strong scientific evidence in order to protect patients from unsubstantiated claims. Paolo enriched the field by his astute observations and in-depth knowledge of both old and new literature of bone biology.

We will remember Paolo as an eloquent speaker. His prose was beautiful, clear, and precise without ever compromising the depth and novelty of concepts under discussion. We have always enjoyed his talks especially when he improvised usually speaking in his delightfully sculptured sentences and at the same time choosing the slides, which fitted best for the issue he was talking about. We have sadly lost a scientist who was able to capture the beauty of bone tissue as he usually demonstrated in his presentations and publications.

We, and many others, experienced and benefitted from Paolo’s generous personality and helpful attitude. This was especially evident in his interaction with young scientists and trainees, with whom he spent long hours during his visits to international labs, discussing their experiments, supporting their independence and encouraging them to pursue novel and untraditional ideas. Outside the lecture halls and hospital corridors, Paolo was a wonderful friend who shared his inner thoughts about life, art, history, politics, and literature. Many of us will miss his unselfserving commitment and generous support when needed.

We will always remember Paolo for his courage, creativity and uncompromising search for the scientific truth. We feel that his spirit influenced us and will stay with us.

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