



In Memoriam: Fernando Aiuti, MD (June 8, 1935–January 9, 2019)

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Fernando Aiuti, co-founder of the European Society for Primary Immunodeficiencies (ESID) and a pioneer in the fight against HIV, passed away on January 9, 2019. He was born in 1935 in the town of Urbino, one of the cradles of Italian Renaissance art and architecture, to which he was profoundly bound. He died in Rome at the age of 83, where his medical and scientific career took place. Since 1980, he was Full

Professor of Internal Medicine and Clinical Immunology “La Sapienza” University of Rome, and Director of the Division of Allergy and Clinical Immunology at Policlinico Umberto I Hospital in Rome, Italy. In his career, he has published nearly 400 papers and performed research in collaboration with Karolinska Institute and the Memorial Sloan Kettering Institute. He studied the pathogenesis and therapies of several immunological disorders such as primary and acquired immunodeficiencies, lymphoproliferative disorders, autoimmune and rheumatic diseases, allergic diseases, and viral infections. He was founder and President of the Italian National Association for the fight against AIDS (Anlaids), President of the Italian Society of Immunology and Immunopathology, and member of the International committee of experts for the classification of primary immunodeficiencies (PID). He was a member of several national commissions, including those against AIDS, drug abuse, infectious diseases, and for rare diseases, and President of the health policies committee of the Rome City Council. In 1994, he received the highest award granted by the Italian Republic, *Cavaliere di Gran Croce*.

Fernando Aiuti was a pioneer in raising awareness of PID in the medical and scientific community, together with Claude Griscelli in France, Jaak Vossen in the Netherlands, and Roland Levinsky in the UK. He diagnosed and treated, in collaboration with Prof. Luisa Businco of the Pediatric Department in Rome, the first Italian patients suffering from primary immunodeficiencies. In 1977, he organized the first Italian Registry for PID in adult and children, knowing that only a network of experts could help to define the natural history of these diseases, with specific focus on autoimmunity and cancer [1]. Since 1983, he was extensively involved in the activity and organization of the first meetings of the European Group for Immunodeficiencies (EGID) meetings, the informal forerunner of ESID.

The experience gained on primary immunodeficiencies was then extended to the study of HIV infection since the beginning of AIDS pandemic. I personally remember him coming back home after his visits to the USA, worried after having seen the first patients with a yet unknown acquired

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immunodeficiency syndrome. In his center, the first Italian patients with AIDS were diagnosed [2], and the first trial on a new antiretroviral drug was conducted. His group also investigated T-lymphocytic malignancy associated with human T cell lymphotropic virus type I (HTLV-1) [3].

Fernando Aiuti played a major role in Italy in making AIDS a treatable disease, fostering research on AIDS and preventing spread of fake news about its transmission. His students remember the sense of loss in face of an illness for which there was only the certainty of death and his words of encouragement on the role of research. Prof. Aiuti has succeeded in the difficult task of maintaining a high scientific profile over the years, combining it with a social and communicative commitment, such that clinical immunology has become a science known to most people. His efforts had the sole mission of defending health, of fighting against the discrimination of HIV-positive people and of giving the public opinion useful messages to avoid risky behavior. In 1991, he was portrayed in a photo kissing Rosaria Iardino, an HIV seropositive woman, as a disruptive and strongly liberating gesture that “allowed to break the glass that was separating HIV infected persons and the society, so that we could become “normal people”” according to Mrs. Iardino.

Prof. Aiuti had a tough personality but was very generous and upright in his public battles, often provocative, and never afraid to make some powerful enemies. He promoted prevention of HIV transmission by distributing condoms in the school and strenuously fought in television against pseudoscientists who were claiming that HIV was not the cause of AIDS. He openly criticized the Italian system of assigning, without a peer review, public funding for research grants or clinical trials such as those for an experimental HIV vaccine, and censured academic promotions that appointed mediocre, loyal pupils rather than selecting brilliant scientists [4].

As a son who has followed his medical path, I was lucky to grow up in a home environment that inspired me with his scientific curiosity, moral integrity, and love for patients and their families. I am honored that eventually our paths in some ways crossed again, when I started treating a form of PID with

an HIV-derived viral vector, that in its wild type version he fought for 30 years.

All his students lived with him a unique experience, to see the birth and the growth of a new medical science, the clinical immunology. Prof. Aiuti dealt with dramatic infections such as HIV, but at the same time he “infected” those who worked with him with the passion for knowledge that can become medical knowledge. For those of us who worked with him, it is impossible not to remember the passion, the tenacity, the screams, the reconciliations, and the great laughs done together. His alumni will take with them his thirst for knowledge, for continuous updating, his courage to expose himself, and the ability to make choices not taken for granted, with the only purpose of protection of health.

He is survived by his wife Inge, who patiently supported him throughout his career, their children Alessandro, Simone, and Olivia and their six beloved grandchildren. Fernando Aiuti, an early figure of the growing field of PID and AIDS medicine, will be greatly missed by his family and his many friends and colleagues across the world.

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