

In Memoriam: Valerio Nobili (1966–2019)

The future is a story of children

The Hepatology community recently lost one of its foremost clinician investigators, Valerio Nobili. Valerio was internationally renowned for his outstanding contribution to research in the clinical aspects of pediatric fatty liver disease and his early passing, at the age of 52, is a tremendous loss for science and for his patients.

Valerio graduated in Medicine at the Sapienza University of Rome (Italy) in 1990 and underwent full specialist training in Pediatrics at the same University (1994). He had developed a special interest in researching and curing pediatric liver diseases since the beginning of his career. Pursuing this interest, in 1993, he spent one year as a research fellow of the Department of Gastroenterology of St Thomas' Hospital of London. In 1993 he was hired to the Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital in Rome, initially as junior staff and later as Consultant in Hepatology. His desire and ambition to progress in his career led him to spend long stages of training at King's College Hospital in London with Professor Giordina Mieli-Vergani at the Pediatric Liver Disease unit (2004) and at the Pediatric Liver Transplantation Unit in the same hospital (2007).

In 2007, Valerio funded and rapidly gave international visibility to the Liver Research Unit at Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital in Rome. He was currently the Director of the Hepatology, Gastroenterology and Nutrition Unit and the Head of Gut and Hepatic Diseases Research Unit at Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital in Rome.

Valerio contributed greatly to the international reputation of his hospital in Rome and more widely to Italian and European Hepatology. He published over 250 original papers in top peer-reviewed journals and is regarded as one of the pioneers and worldwide experts in pediatric NAFLD. We had the pleasure of working with him and experiencing his strength and never-ending enthusiasm. This translated into an almost daily contact by email and telephone from the phase of ideation of a project to the finalization of a manuscript. The whole process was seasoned with alternating joy and anxiety but with final satisfaction guaranteed. Many of Valerio's papers are genuine landmarks in Medicine and will be quoted for decades if not for ever. To be mentioned is the publication which likely launched Valerio on the international stage: Nobili V, *et al.* NAFLD in children: a prospective clinical-pathological study and effect of lifestyle advice. *Hepatology* 2006; 44:458–465. The last author of this paper was Paulo Angulo (1965–2015) another prematurely lost colleague and great friend of Valerio. In retrospective terms, the content of this paper represents the strategic plan for the action that Valerio implemented until the day of his death: metabolic disease starts in the early stages of life and that therefore the pediatrician is decisive for the future life of the adult.

Valerio contributed to numerous committees including the scientific committees of the ESPGHAN (European Society Gastro



Hepatology Nutrition Pediatric) Hepatology Committee and EMA (European Medicine Agency) Expert for liver disease. He was the current coordinator of the European Pediatric non-alcoholic fatty liver disease registry (EU-PNAFLD) funded by the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL).

Valerio was also an extraordinary teacher and communicator. From 2017, he was Associate professor at the Department of Pediatrics, University La Sapienza, Rome, Italy and was teaching as Professor in the PhD course in Experimental and Clinical Hepatology and Gastroenterology and in two Master courses (Gastroenterology and Pediatric Hepatology and Neonatology).

Beyond and above his scientific achievements, it is not easy to summarize in words the man who Valerio was. The new auditorium of the Bambino Gesù Hospital in San Paolo Fuori le Mura has been recently named "Auditorium Valerio Nobili" with this motivation: "Valerio represented the two pillars of the Bambino Gesù: science and compassion". Valerio was a passionate, enthusiastic researcher, ceaselessly endeavoring to gain a better knowledge of NAFLD and to prevent its complications in children. He was able to transmit his love for research in this field to all of the members of his team. He was endowed with an extraordinary communicative ability and could be at the same time a tremendous and willing collaborator and a true friend. He was also a compassionate physician who devoted most of his time and efforts to his little patients, addressing them with a contagious smile. Valerio was extraordinary in his normality, the demonstration of how we can be great scientists and be

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smiling, human and welcoming. We will miss his skills, his professionalism, his overwhelming laughter.

In concluding this obituary, we are aware of the responsibility we have assumed in expressing our sadness on behalf of Valerio's close collaborators and particularly his devoted co-worker Anna Alisi to whom we are indebted for the help in preparing this article. We are also very close to Valerio's beloved wife Simona and the whole family.

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