

Giorgio Parmiani

October 24, 1938 – March 21, 2021

This is my fond and grateful memory of Giorgio Parmiani, for his mentorship that inspired and motivated my research career and the passion for immunology.

I entered his lab in December of 1978 and I remember his encouragement for my first presentation at the Gruppo di Cooperazione in Immunologia (GCI) 1980, in Todi. At that time, the discovery of MHC restriction was influential and MHC and Antigen were thought to be spatially associated to allow their embrace by T lymphocytes. Nevertheless, this finding was the key to understand immunosurveillance and the concept of altered self. The carcinogen-induced tumor specific transplantation antigens (TSTA), which in mice were the hallmark of altered self-recognition and that were operationally defined only through transplantation assay, still awaited the demonstration of their recognition by cytotoxic T lymphocyte via MHC restriction. I had the privilege to have his guide for solving these issues by isolating CTL and blocking their activity using proper anti-H-2 antibodies and using chimeric mice. After my post-doc in Philadelphia, we were among the first to engineer tumor cells with cytokine genes to generate cell vaccine starting with colony stimulating factors, passing from IL-2 and IL-4 also tested in patients, and ending with GM-CSF plus CD40L to make the vaccine suitable to encounter dendritic cells for cross-presentation rather than rendering a tumor cells a surrogate DC, unable to co-stimulate. This has been the main work we did together toward my independency, but still coauthoring experimental papers till 2007. Other colleagues at Istituto Nazionale Tumori have had benefit from his mentorship, to cite few out of several Andrea Anichini and Licia Rivoltini. His seed of knowledge and leadership then sprouted at San Raffaele Hospital where he moved in 2006 making new disciples in Vincenzo Russo e Cristina Maccalli.

In his research career, Parmiani published more than 450 papers, has been internationally recognized as a leading expert in tumor immunotherapy, awarded by several prizes including the Richard V. Smalley Memorial Award from the Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer, he was member of the American Societies of Immunology and Cancer Research, SIICA and president of Italian Society of Cancerology, Founder and first President of NIBIT.

He was a reserved, serious person not without a British sense of humor, of great intelligence, perseverant and open to discussion. Science and politics were his main passions, beyond the beloved family, he had a strong commitment to his town community and, not to forget, he was unbeatable at tennis.

Thank you and goodbye Giorgio

MARIO PAOLO COLOMBO