

## OBITUARY



## ANIMAL MODELS

# Luigi (Gino) Chieco-Bianchi: a man linking hematological and virological research

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Limited 2023

*Leukemia* (2024) 38:233–234; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41375-023-02087-5>



**Credit:** Courtesy of G. Pizzolo

Luigi Chieco Bianchi, called Gino by his friends, died in Padua on June 23rd 2023, two months exactly after having celebrated his 90th birthday in occasion of a beautiful meeting organized by his fellows in Venice to honour him. The title of this meeting, Genes, Viruses and Cancer, synthesises very well which has been the focus of the research performed by Gino in his long and successful career. In addition, the attendance in this occasion of so many eminent scientists coming from different parts of the world, highlights not only the important contribution that Gino has given to this field, but also the affection that his personality has attracted long all these years. Indeed Gino can be defined as a gentleman of research.




He was born in 1933 in Bari in a traditional bourgeois Apulian family (his father was also Lord Mayor of Bari for a while) and studied Medicine at the University of Bari, where he graduated in 1959 and where he worked as assistant professor until 1966 when he moved to the Padua University as Professor of Experimental Oncology. In 1986, he was appointed as Director of the Institute for Experimental Oncology and Surgery at Padua University. His early experimental work centered around the Graffi-virus, a murine leukemia virus isolated by the German virologist Arnold Graffi in Berlin-Buch in 1953. In the early 1960s Gino went to spend a very productive period with Graffi in East Berlin. Graffi was a multitasking personality, not only a scientist, but also a painter and a music composer. Gino enjoyed very much the time with him. Since then the oncogenic leukemia viruses stayed as focus of Gino's research for the rest of his life.

During this period, he married Anna Maria, his wife for more than 60 years, with whom he had 3 daughters, Fulvia, Maria Alessandra and Antonella.

In April 1969, Gino founded, together with Sante Tura and other Italian hematologists, the Associazione Italiana contro le Leucemie (AIL) and in September of the same year, he participated for the first time to the 4th Symposium of the International Association for Comparative Research in Leukemia and Related Diseases (IACRLRDs) at Cherry Hill near Philadelphia, an Association of scientists founded in the early 1960s by a group of veterinarians, virologists and hematologists under the leadership of Gustav Rosenberger, a veterinarian from Hannover, and including among the others personalities like Gordon Theilen, Frank Rauscher, William Dameshek, Boris Lapin, Henry Rappaport, Werner Schäfer, Jan Svoboda, Don Metcalf, Charlotte Friend, Guy de Thé, Yohei Ito and Luc Montagnier. Gino was requested to organize the 5th Symposium of IACRLRD in Padua/Venice in 1971 and since then he became a pillar of IACRLRD. That symposium was attended by Bob Gallo, 34 years old at that time, with whom Gino started a life-long cooperation, most visible on the HIV and HTLV-1 fields. The term comparative research in the name of IACRLRD originates from the observation of the presence of leukemia viruses in all species in which they were looked for and from the assumption that by analogy such viruses can be found also in man and, as a consequence the search for these viruses in human leukemias was central at the beginning. But topics were evolving as was leukemia research. When oncogenes and growth factors emerged, clinical translation of research findings became important for diagnosis (e.g. BCR-ABL1), monitoring and treatment (e.g. G-CSF), the topics were not only limited to retroviruses and leukemia, but comprised molecular and cell biology in the broadest meaning and after Gino's 2nd symposium in Padua/Venice in 1991 this shift became evident. Gino organized also a 3rd symposium in 2001 that became remarkable because it took place in the first floor of the Ducal (Doge's) Palace in Venice directly on Marcus Square. Gino's kind and balancing personality connected with his standing and reputation as organizer of successful symposia was important for the transition of IACRLRD from basic to translational research and in general it was important to connect basic research to clinical hematology both as a researcher (more than 400 publications) and as counselor of government agencies and private foundations like NIH and AIRC, (Associazione Italiana per la Ricerca sul Cancro) and Cancer Research Forum of the European Union among many others. He received many

Received: 15 October 2023 Revised: 30 October 2023 Accepted: 10 November 2023  
Published online: 6 December 2023

recognition and awards during his life, but we like to remember in particular his quiet and gentle, but at the same time very rational approach to come to shared solutions and on this aspect we will certainly miss Gino, who can be considered a real model for young researchers on how to approach and to live in the scientific world. Thank you Gino.

Rüdiger Hehlmann<sup>1,2</sup> and Giuseppe Saglio<sup>3</sup>    
<sup>1</sup>*Emeritus Professor of Medicine of the Heidelberg University, Mannheim, Germany.* <sup>2</sup>*President ELN Foundation, Weinheim, Germany.* <sup>3</sup>*Emeritus Professor of Internal Medicine and Hematology of the University of Turin, Turin, Italy.*  
email: [giuseppe.saglio@unito.it](mailto:giuseppe.saglio@unito.it)