

# Alessandro Pileri: an enthusiastic pioneer of modern hematology

Mario Boccardo,<sup>1</sup> Paolo Corradini,<sup>2</sup> Massimo Massaia<sup>3</sup> and Corrado Tarella<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Divisione di Ematologia, Università di Torino, Torino; <sup>2</sup>Divisione di Ematologia, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori, Università di Milano; <sup>3</sup>Dipartimento di Biotecnologie Molecolari e Scienze per la Salute, Università di Torino, Torino and <sup>4</sup>Divisione di Onco-Ematologia, Istituto Europeo di Oncologia, Milano, Italy

**Correspondence:** P Corradini  
[paolo.corradini@unimi.it](mailto:paolo.corradini@unimi.it)

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“An enthusiastic doctor” - this was the most appropriate definition of Prof. Alessandro Pileri, made by his son, Claudio, at his father’s funeral. This is also the sentiment shared by everyone who had had the chance to meet him: an enthusiastic physician, who was deeply passionate about medicine and science. He used to say: “There is no good medicine without good research”. With this, he also wanted to remind everyone that science requires effort and dedication.

Prof. Pileri was born in Ancona in 1928. He graduated with honors in Rome, and then moved to Torino where he worked at the institute directed by Giulio Cesare Dogliotti, which was a breeding ground for new talents



Alessandro Pileri, 1928-2024.

in medicine. Pileri followed his post-graduate studies in Brussels, at the Institute directed by Jean Brachet, a pioneer in RNA studies. On his return to Italy, he worked with Felice Gavosto on several research projects, developing the use of tritiated thymidine, a cutting-edge reagent at that time. They discovered that the very fast growth of leukemic cells was, indeed, characterized by low proliferation, with massive recruitment into the cell cycle. These groundbreaking findings led to the development of effective treatments for cancer. In the 1970s, Prof. Pileri had the foresight to recognize that hematology had already grown to the point at which it had become an independent branch of medicine. He thus became one of the first university professors of hematology, forming a distinguished trio with Franco Mandelli and Sante Tura, three brilliant clinicians and investigators who were widely considered to be the founders of Italian hematology. After his years at the Dogliotti Institute, Prof. Pileri set up and directed the University Division of Hematology in the early 1980s, which thrived both as an academic institute and as a clinical and research center. Early studies on cell

kinetics were applied to multiple myeloma, marking the beginning of a long series of critical achievements that made the University Division of Hematology of Turin a global reference center in the field of this disease. He also pioneered the use of mobilized stem cells, enabling the widespread use of intensified treatments with auto-transplantation in myeloma, a procedure still used all over the world.

Under Prof. Pileri’s leadership, hundreds of young doctors were trained. They had the opportunity to receive exceptional scientific training, and many of them now hold leadership positions in hematology departments in Italy and globally.

Prof. Pileri’s commitment to research was the *raison d’être* and the stimulus that fuelled his long career. He served as Vice Dean at the University of Torino, he was then President of the Italian Society of Hematology, and was President of the local Ethical Committee until the age of 90.

Finally, Prof. Pileri was not only a visionary, but also a gentle and inspiring mentor. It is rare to find someone who can guide young researchers, influencing the direction of their career while leaving them the freedom to choose their own path. This is probably the reason why so many doctors consider Prof. Pileri to be, not only a founder of modern hematology, but also a passionate influencer of several generations of hematologists.

*On behalf of all the colleagues of his School of Hematology at the University of Turin*

Prof. Mario Boccardo  
 Prof. Paolo Corradini  
 Prof. Massimo Massaia  
 Prof. Corrado Tarella