

Obituary

Remembering Professor Roberto Stasi (August 24th 1961 – January 28th 2014)

Doctor Roberto Stasi was too young to die at 52 years of age with so many scientific achievements still lying ahead. His friends in Italy, Europe, the USA, and indeed all around the world, grieve his sudden loss. We want to commemorate him by giving voice to the many colleagues and scientists that have conveyed their sorrow to us, and who have expressed their affection and their admiration for his contributions to the advancement of hematology. Roberto was a very discreet person and did not seek praise or honors. We would like to respect this in providing a simple account of his life.

Roberto was born in Monterotondo, an ancient town near Rome, where he moved to complete high school. He attended the Medical School at the “Sapienza” University in Rome where he graduated in Medicine in 1987 and specialized in Hematology in 1990. He then obtained a Ph.D. in Hematology at the “Tor Vergata” University in Rome in 1997 and a specialist degree in Oncology in 1999. During these years, he published 60 papers in cooperation with his colleagues at the Department of Hematology of the “Tor Vergata” University in Rome, many as first author. These papers were mostly devoted to collaborative research studies in the biology and clinical aspects of lymphoid and myeloid malignancies.

In 1998, Roberto was made senior consultant in hematology and oncology at the “Regina Apostolorum” Hospital in Albano Laziale, in the hills surrounding Rome. His reputation as a great scientist and as a trustworthy and empathic physician grew rapidly and he was loved by his patients for his untiring and caring support. During this period, he focused more and more on immune thrombocytopenia (ITP), papers on which made up the bulk of his more than 150 papers published in major international journals, and he gained fame as an untiring clinical researcher, spanning the entire field of hematology. Indeed, his contribution extended to autoimmune cytopenias, the clinical use of erythropoietin and myeloid growth factors, acute myeloid leukemia, myelodysplastic syndromes, and even solid tumors. In 2009, he moved to the St. George’s Healthcare NHS Trust, one of London’s leading teaching hospitals, as consultant hematologist. As a recognized international authoritative expert on ITP, he was invited to give numerous talks at international meetings of the major scientific hematology societies, such as the European



Roberto Stasi.

Hematology Association (EHA) and the American Society of Hematology (ASH), while he never turned his back on less well known educational initiatives. His contribution in ITP is remarkable from many points of view, including the pioneering exploration of the efficacy and safety of rituximab and its pathophysiological mechanism, the relevance of *Helicobacter pylori* infection, the role of T-reg lymphocytes, and the natural history of the disease. He made a huge contribution to the investigation of the impact and appropriate use of thrombopoietin-receptor agonists in the treatment of the different phases of ITP while maintaining a rigorous independence from any commercial interest.

Roberto’s great experience and high ethical stature were also appreciated by the European Medicines Agency and by the Italian Drug Agency, which relied on him for consultation in the field of hematology and oncology. He also offered his help to ITP patients’ organizations in the UK and in Italy. His contribution to the international projects for the standardization of definitions and terminology in ITP and of its bleeding manifestations was fundamental. His assistance in these projects remains unforgettable and the achievements made would have been unthinkable without his lucid critical discernment and generous cooperation. For several years, he was very active within the EHA, offering his precious support to the Scientific Working Group on Thrombocytopenias, which he chaired in 2013. He organized the EHA-SWG Scientific Meeting “Focus on Thrombocytopenia and Disorders of Platelet Function” in Lisbon in September 2013. Sadly, this memorable event proved to be his last contribution and the last occasion we had to enjoy his company and to make plans for the future.

In late 2013, Roberto returned home to Rome to rest after an extremely stressful period, and we had the pleasure of his company and conversation during which he expressed his hopes of soon being involved once more in new scientific projects.

Roberto had many friends and admirers throughout the world, and the Italian hematology community of which he was part is proud to have known him. His tragic and sudden death leaves us all devastated. He will always be remembered.

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Roberto at the first meeting of the International Working Group on ITP in Vicenza, Italy, October 2007.