Franco Rilke (1929–2009)

Sadly, Professor Franco Rilke passed away last July. From the seventies to the nineties, he served as director of the Department of Pathology at the National Cancer Institute of Milan and later as scientific director of the same institute. His outstanding diagnostic skills and attitude to scientific research, teaching and organization were highly appreciated at the international and national level. Professor Rilke played a pivotal role in the development of surgical pathology in Italy by drafting operative instructions that anticipated the quality control programmes, as well as by organizing memorable teaching courses. He contributed to the professional and scientific development of many distinguished pathologists who now work both in Italy as well as in other countries.

Haematopathology was one of his main scientific and diagnostic interests. He initiated a fruitful international collaboration with the main European groups in the early seventies, being one of the founders of the European Lymphoma Club. Fluent in both English and German, in line with the cultural tradition of his family that included the central-European poet Reiner Maria Rilke, he developed a strong personal and professional relationship with Professor Karl Lennert that resulted in his active participation in the Kiel Classification (Figure 1). Professor Rilke contributed greatly to the diffusion of the latter and subsequently took part in the processes that led on the one hand to the Working Formulation (Figure 2) and on the other hand to the European Lymphoma Study Group, from which evolved the European Association for Haematopathology (EAHP). He was the first Italian member to serve on the EAHP council. Professor Rilke's death is a great loss for Pathology in general and Haematopathology in particular. For those of us who closely collaborated with him or had the privilege of having been trained by him, his loss is felt even more.

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