

In memory of Prof. Carlo Grassi

On January 4th, 2022 Professor Carlo Grassi died at home in Milan, at the age of 95 years.

Maybe some young chest physicians do not know his whole moral and professional stature: this is the reason why we write this obituary, even if we know that when the history of respiratory medicine is written, in a few decades, Carlo Grassi will be one of its absolute protagonists.

Firstly, we would like to speak about his human side, and only after this presentation, speak about his academic career as Carlo Grassi himself would have preferred.

Carlo Grassi was a man of great and varied culture, perfectly at ease in every contest, both formal and informal, a good nature person, a man made of an ancient mould, an academic figure then and now extremely rare to find.

One can be puzzled if asked to choose the most important among his many qualities: probably what have always been his major features (which impresses his regular collaborators as well as occasional acquaintances) have always been his self-mockery (how far from self-celebration!) and his respect for any other person, regardless of the latter's status. His office's door (discreetly guarded by the tireless Giovanna) was always open to other colleagues looking for professional guidance or advice.

He graduated in Physiology in 1950 and in Pharmacology in 1958. He taught Physiology at the University of Sassari from 1962 to 1968 where he was appointed full Professor in 1968. The next year he was summoned to the newly instituted Chair of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Medicine at the University of Pavia. Here he organised the whole structure of the new institute: the clinical unit, the associated research laboratories and teaching facilities. From 1970 to 1981 he was pro-Rector of the University of Pavia. In the Seventies he became member and secretary of the Commission for Bacteriology and Immunology of the International Union against Tuberculosis (IUATLD), member of the International Working Group on Mycobacterial Taxonomy, and Secretary of the Italian Association of Chemotherapy, becoming its President in 1970 (till 1976). Vice President of the International Society of Chemotherapy from 1971 to 1975, he became President for the 4-year term from 1976 to 1979.

During the Eighties he became President of the Italian Society of Pneumology from 1983 to 1988, of the Italian Society for the Testing and Development of Drugs Post Registration from 1987 to 2000, of the Italian Federation against Tuberculosis and Social Lung Diseases from 1994 to 1999, and of the Italian Society for Aerosols in Medicine from 1998 to 2000. For his research in anti-tuberculosis drugs and in respiratory medicine he received the Medal for Merit in Education, Culture and Art, conferred by the President of the Italian Republic on proposal of the Minister of Education (1985), and the Premio Morelli of the "Accademia dei Lincei" for research in Respiratory Medicine in 1987.

Outside Italy, he was awarded a Doctorate in Medicine "Honoris causa" from the Paul Sabatier University of Toulouse in 1981.



Prof. Carlo Grassi in his office in Milan on his 90th birthday.

His clear and concise exposition made him an excellent teacher and speaker in countless national and international meetings. He also was a distinguished journalist, collaborating with diverse publications, both educational medical journals and newspapers. He wrote chapters for both national and international books in drugs pharmacology and respiratory medicine and acted as Editor-in-Chief of many Pulmonology journals. The importance of his scientific contributions cannot be underscored. With more than 550 publications he stands as a key figure in Respiratory Medicine in Italy and abroad.

Finally, one cannot speak about Professor Carlo Grassi without mentioning Prof. Giuliana Gialdrone Grassi: she was his partner both in life (their marriage lasted for more than 60 years) and in scientific research. Both of them were pupils of the School of Pharmacology in the Milan University, chaired by Prof. Trabucchi, and after that, kept on carrying out together research in Respiratory drugs and medicine. After his retirement he was appointed Professor Emeritus of the University of Pavia, but continued to be interested in Pulmonology, participating (until December of 2021!) to pulmonology meetings and National congresses, thus witnessing his extreme intellectual vitality.

The photo illustrating this obituary, taken in his office on the very day of his 90th birthday is just the way we would like to remember our “Maestro”: an informal good-humoured man with a huge scientific knowledge as a background.

Thank you “Maestro”, for ever.

Lucio Casali, Stefano Nardini