In memory of Gianfranco Del Prete: a scientist without borders

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This issue of the Journal of Infection in Developing Countries honours the memory of a brilliant scientist, immunologist, teacher and friend, Professor Gianfranco Del Prete, University of Florence, Italy, who passed away 8 November 2010. With respect to his passion for immunology, this issue presents three review articles on the role of immune responses in Yersinia pestis infection, on developing live vaccines against plague, and on T-cell response to bacterial agents [1,2,3]. One more article on infectious diseases and autoimmunity will follow in an upcoming issue.

It is very difficult to write a memorial for a dear friend and colleague who passionately devoted his life to science and participated in global cooperation projects to improve the health care in developing countries. His work focused mainly on diseases that affect the health of millions of people worldwide, particularly tuberculosis (TB), parasitic diseases, and the most neglected infectious or forgotten agents such as pestis.

Gianfranco was born in Brescia, Italy, in 1948. After graduating with distinction at the top of his class from the University of Padua (1972) as a medical doctor, he served as a research fellow in basic and clinical immunology. In 1978 he moved to the medical school in the prestigious Institute of Internal Medicine and Immunoallergy at the University of Florence, under the direction of Prof. Mario Ricci, the father of allergology in Italy. Gianfranco was promoted to associate professor and then full professor of Internal Medicine in 1995, working at the Department of Internal Medicine, coordinating a fruitful research group of young scientists. In 2004, he became the director of the Allergy and Clinical Immunology Postgraduate School, where he taught both medical and postgraduate students. He was also responsible for the patient care unit at the University Hospital of Careggi (SOD Patologia Medica).

Gianfranco was well-known internationally and he spent time as a visiting scientist at several prestigious institutions abroad during his career. Of particular note are his appointments first at the Department of Immunology at Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA, where he worked with Prof. R. Geha, and then at the Basel Institute for Immunology in Basel, Switzerland, where he worked with Dr. A.
In 2007 Gianfranco had another interesting experience working with Dr. A. Talarmin and Dr. L. Rahalisson at the Institute Pasteur Madagascar, Antananarivo, Madagascar, on *Yersinia pestis*, building the immunological basis for a possible innovative vaccine [5].

To address the importance of combating co-infections of neglected infectious diseases, he participated with scientists from 14 different African and European countries at a meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 9-11 September 2007.

The important message coming from these outstanding collaborations was that the only possibility for winning the fight against infections in low-income countries is by studying, in the most global way possible, the complex interactions between different infections and conditions of malnourishment [8].

To achieve Gianfranco’s goals it will be essential to put in place a sustainable network composed of researchers in disease-endemic countries and researchers in the developed world, which will implement an integrated immunological research effort across disciplines and diseases. This network needs to include a strategy for the promotion of high-level training pathways for African researchers and sustaining their careers in African institutions, which is the exactly one of the principal goals of JIDC. With these views in mind, Gianfranco embraced with great enthusiasm the aim of JIDC from its inception and he was one of the first reviewers for our journal.

We are proud to dedicate this issue to our friend, and we thank all the authors who collaborated with JIDC on this initiative. I think this is the best way to honor the memory of Gianfranco Del Prete, not just with simple words but with interesting reviews that can be helpful for students, medical doctors, laboratorists and scientists from developing countries.

We are close to his wife Franca and all his family, particularly Marco and Giorgio, and we believe Gianfranco’s teaching will not be forgotten.

References

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