



## Ignazio Olivieri

Professor Ignazio Benedetto Olivieri, age 64, died at his home in Trivigno, Potenza, Italy, on July 28 after having colon cancer for a year. He had received his medical degree in 1979 and his rheumatology specialty training at the University of Pisa in Italy. He worked as researcher in the Division of Rheumatology at Pisa University, then from 1993 to 1998 he worked in the Division of Rheumatology of Policlinico S. Orsola-Malpighi in Bologna. In 1998 he became Chief of the Rheumatology Department of Lucania, San Carlo Hospital of Potenza and Madonna delle Grazie Hospital of Matera, Italy.

He was an outstanding academic physician, teacher and clinical investigator who published more than 400 scientific papers in the most important rheumatological journals. He headed a Behçet disease and spondyloarthritis (SpA) care and research team investigating the pathogenesis, epidemiology, treatment, and outcomes of these diseases. His research contributions were recognized both nationally and internationally. He identified the predominant inflammatory lesions in dactylitis, defined the clinical spectrum of late-onset SpA, studied the epidemiology of Behçet dis-

ease in Southern Italy, helped in defining the characteristic differentiating features of diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis from ankylosing spondylitis, and contributed much to the debate over whether Behçet disease belongs to the broad spectrum of SpA diseases.

Olivieri was a member of the European League Against Rheumatism's (EULAR) expert task force on recommendations for the management of Behçet disease, psoriatic arthritis, and ankylosing spondylitis. He was also a member of many international research organizations, including the Assessment in Ankylosing Spondylitis (ASAS) International Society, the Group for Research and Assessment of Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis (GRAPPA), and the American College of Rheumatology (ACR). He served on the editorial boards of *The Journal of Rheumatology*, *Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology*, *Iranian Journal of Rheumatology*, and *American Latin Journal of Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis*. He was also codirector of *Reumatismo*, the official journal of Italian Society of Rheumatology (SIR).

In September 2016, he convened the 17th

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International Congress of Behçet Disease in Matera, Italy, his hometown. He was ill with cancer, but he made it a very successful scientific meeting and received a standing ovation at the end. In his final days, Olivieri continued to work on one of his most important achievements, the establishment of the Rheumatological Scientific Institute of Research and Care (Istituto di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico) in his beloved region (Basilicata). He considered it an acknowledgment for his scientific and clinical activity, but above all an opportunity for his collaborators.

Olivieri was a kind and soft-spoken gentleman with an unwavering commitment to patient care, social justice, and intellectual rigor. What impressed me since I met him and started working with him was his strong spirit of service to the public, carried out with personal honesty, balance and discretion, coupled with a contagious enthusiasm for scientific research, always performed with rigorous methodology. In other words, Ignatius has always had a strong “ethics of responsibility”, a total commitment to service for others who has led his entire human, medical, and SIR president’s adventure. His modesty and talents impressed his colleagues and patients. He was also an outstanding clinician and teacher. Olivieri devoted his energy to patient care, and was always able to talk with his patients and establish close professional relationships.

He was the immediate past president of the Italian Society of Rheumatology. He had a special talent for recognizing professional needs and then fulfilling them, and thus during his tenure as president, he greatly advanced the cause of the subspecialty always trying to bring harmony between its various parts. One of Olivieri’s greatest legacies has been to support and encourage the participation of young people providing resources, education, and support for younger rheumatologists. His success in this is shown by a touching letter to him and to the board of the Italian Society of Rheumatology, sent at the end of his presidency by a young rheumatologist: *“You were not just the President of the Italian Society of Rheumatology, but the president of All, the president of professors, young people, men and women, who, thanks to you, felt represented and protected. ... Thank you for your example of strength, tenacity, and extreme dignity. An example for all of us; rather than a professor ...a master.”* This was our dear friend Ignazio Olivieri. The best way to honor him is to follow his example.

Olivieri’s death leaves a tremendous void for his many lifelong colleagues and friends, and his patients. He was extraordinarily proud of his family. He is survived by his wife, Dr. Angela Padula, also a rheumatologist and his precious partner of life and work; and a daughter, Francesca.

**Carlo Salvarani**