

# Piergiorgio Zuccaro

## An important man in the fight against smoking

Roberta Pacifici<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) Head of National Centre on Addiction and Doping National Institute of Health of Italy



**CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:** Roberta Pacifici, Head of National Centre on Addiction and Doping, National Institute of Health of Italy  
email: roberta.pacifici@iss.it

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Reason and feeling. This is the binomial that has crossed the professional life of Piergiorgio Zuccaro, his relationship with colleagues, with the Italian National Institute of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanità) where he worked for almost forty years and finally with science.

From University classrooms he directly entered the laboratories of National Institute of Health, where he created a human and scientific community, whose principal daily work has been the fight against all possible addictions.

A work made of bricks and concrete in which bricks have been the scientific evidences and cement has been the energy, the competence and the enthusiasm of the research group he drove to build the Italian Observatory on Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs of Abuse, recently becoming the National Center on Addictions and Doping. A Centre that has collected his inheritance, the knowledge he generously passed to the boys and girls he raised, giving them as priority targets the scientific truth, the availability to the population asking for information and help and to the Institution that he never stopped to serve.

A duty that did not end with laboratory analyses or with a new scientific publication that would add another piece to the mosaic of knowledge, but that extended its ranges into projects design, alliances for public health and finally translated everything into the living tissue of society, the dialogue with young people, primary recipients of education to a correct lifestyle.

Remembering Piergiorgio is not easy since whereas we try to remember him as an investigator, as the author of more than three hundred scientific publications or as the one who contributed to the design and definition of Respiratory Risk Card and to the definition of smoking habits epidemiology in our Country, there is always much more which knocks to the heart door. From those pages and those projects his smile emerged, the same with which he looked at the life, full with irony and disenchantment that, in any case, never extinguished his passion.

As if the man and the investigator have always been the same person, especially in the work he always shared with us every day.

Even if he was busy every day with many tasks to solve and a goals to reach he always had a space to dry tears or to share joy. A space made of silences or full of words, where his irony could wipe away many clouds because he knew how to get angry, to smile, to forgive, and to be forgiven. With levity and skill.

We have been his team but a part of his family too. All women, "too many" he said, aware that he would never betrayed any of them, even when in the firing meetings he risked to be the minority.

It is difficult to separate the value of the scientist, who signed one of the most cited articles on the correlation between the value of cotinine concentration in blood and the amount of smoked nicotine [1] from that of a man who never stopped to give a hand to someone in his group, creating a chain of solidarity that we will hold close to us as one of his most precious gifts.

Even in the battles for public health for the building of real health prevention, it would be difficult to distinguish the passion of a research manager, struggling to demonstrate with the scientific evidence that all the resources to promote the total smoking cessation had to be set up, from the concern and sometimes even the grief and loss in front of any increase in the incidence of lung cancer in national population, so that every challenge was always a human and professional one.

“The only cigarette that does not hurt is the never smoked one” this was Piergiorgio most famous sentence, and in this way while writing the first Italian Clinical Guidelines to promote smoking cessation, he also promoted the construction of audiovisual materials for schools to catch the students, because he knew very well that it was striking to bet on the future generations.

And on the future we should also bet now that Piergiorgio left us, with the certainty that he has never really abandoned us and that he will continue to dry our tears and smile with us, who will continue our scientific battles on his name.

## Reference

1. Rosa M, Pacifici R, Altieri I, Pichini S, Ottaviani G, Zuccaro P. How the steady-state cotinine concentration in cigarette smokers is directly related to nicotine intake. *Clin Pharmacol Ther.* 1992 Sep;52(3):324-9.

