

NEWS

In memoriam: Marco G Cecchini, 1951–2016

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In memoriam Marco G. Cecchini, 1951–2016

On 3 August 2016, our friend and colleague Marco Cecchini died after a brief and severe illness. Marco was a highly recognized and esteemed scientist who contributed to several scientific areas and inspired many colleagues, all over the world, young and old, with his ideas and scientific contributions. He was a friend of many in the scientific community in Europe and elsewhere, and he will be missed dearly.

Marco was born in Verona where he attended school. He received his medical degree from the University of Padua where he graduated 'Magna cum Laude'. After 2 years as resident at the Institute of Clinical Methodology of the University of Padua, Marco moved to Switzerland and joined Marco Baggiolini at the Theodor Kocher Institute of the University of Bern in 1982. In 1984, Marco moved to the Institute of Pathophysiology, headed by Herbert Fleisch. At that time, the institute was all about bisphosphonates, their mode of action and about the development of the bone resorbing cells, the osteoclasts. Marco, together with his colleague Rolf Felix, made very important contributions to the field, demonstrating among other things, the induction of monocyte/macrophage apoptosis by bisphosphonates. A further highlight in Marco's scientific achievements was the finding that osteopetrotic *op/op* mice were deficient in the haematopoietic growth factor macrophage colony-stimulating factor (M-CSF).¹ Together with Rolf Felix, Marco subsequently showed that injections of M-CSF into newborn *op/op* animals would cure the osteopetrotic phenotype.² In a seminal publication with Richard Stanley at the Albert Einstein College in New York, Marco described the distribution of tissue macrophages in *op/op* mice.³ This paper was not only important with respect to the scientific content, but also because it brought other disciplines, like hematology, to the bone field. From August 1993 to April 1994, Marco worked as a visiting associate professor in Medicine at the Department of Medicine, Division of Bone & Mineral Metabolism with Professor M. Rosenblatt at the Beth Israel Hospital in Boston at the Harvard University.

In 1997, Marco changed position to become the head of the Urology Research Laboratory of the Department of Urology and became the leader of the gene therapy group in the context of the Nationales Forschungsprojekt Genterapie (NFP37). With his inquisitive and innovative mind, he opened up new lines of research and his group became a leader in the research on

prostate cancer and bone metastases. He studied extensively the mechanisms leading to osteoblastic and osteolytic bone metastases, and showed that cancer cells with stem cell properties are responsible for the castration resistance in prostate cancer in functional experimental models and in patients.^{4,5} During his time as head of the Urology Research Laboratory, he spent 3 months in a sabbatical at the St Vincent Institute of Medical Research with Prof. Jack Martin at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He was involved in many international consortia, one of which was headed by the Urology Research Laboratory (6th Framework program PROMET project).

Besides his enthusiasm for science, Marco was a man of many interests. No topic was too remote not to be of interest to him and no recipe was too difficult not to be tried in his kitchen. His talents and hobbies were many, just to mention his tremendous skills in painting, which he applied to wonderful drawings of scientific schemes to illustrate his hypotheses, his motor cycling, music and many others. And besides all this, Marco was most happy with his family, devoted to his wife Pia and proud of his sons Luca and Andrea.

With Marco we, the Department of Urology, the Department Clinical Research and the University of Bern, have not only lost a great scientist and original thinker, but also a good and loyal friend. Marco is one who made a substantial contribution internationally and left many traces in science, and in our hearts and minds. He will be missed dearly by his colleagues and friends. Our deepest sympathies are with his family.

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