

The passing of Professor Francesco Lo Coco: the great pioneer of targeted therapy leaves the leukemia community

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Professor Francesco Lo Coco passed away on March 3, 2019. An exceptional clinician and an eminent researcher in the field of leukemia, throughout his life, he has been globally recognized and awarded for his numerous contributions in the field of acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL).

Professor Lo Coco obtained his Degree in Medicine from the [University of Pisa](#), Pisa, IT, and his hematology specialist degree from the [University La Sapienza](#), Rome, IT, before completing his research fellowship in molecular biology at [Columbia University](#), New York, USA. Francesco Lo Coco held the position of full Professor of Hematology at the [University Tor Vergata](#), Rome, IT, and was the Head of the Oncohematology Integrated Diagnostic Laboratory of the Department of Biopathology and Diagnostic Imaging.

During the course of his remarkable career, Francesco Lo Coco was a member of the [Haematologica editorial board](#) (1994–2019), member of the scientific committee of Fondazione Veronesi (2012–2019), chairman of the AIL scientific committee (2014–2019), and coordinator of the [GIMEMA](#) promyelocytic leukemia group. In addition to this, Professor Lo Coco has previously worked on the editorial boards of [Leukemia](#) (1996–2013) and the [Journal of Clinical Oncology](#).

(2010–2013). Moreover, Professor Lo Coco has previously held the role of chairman of the education committee of the [European Hematology Association](#) (2008–2013), and also served on the international members committee (2008–2012), and as a member of the nominating committee (2012–2015) of the [American Society of Hematology](#).

Professor Lo Coco's special interest has been the genetic characterization, diagnosis, monitoring and treatment of acute myeloid leukemia (AML) and APL. A major aspect of Professor Lo Coco's work involved the progression of treatment of APL into the chemotherapy-free era. He was involved in studies examining the efficacy of the all-trans retinoic acid (ATRA) and arsenic trioxide (ATO) combination compared to the ATRA-chemotherapy regimens, and showed in an early study [published](#) in the New England Journal of Medicine, that the chemotherapy-free regimen may be superior to chemotherapy-containing regimens. In addition, he and his colleagues further evolved the concept of pre-emptive therapy for molecular relapse in leukemia, where treatment is given at the time of measurable residual disease recurrence and before the clinical relapse. Furthermore, Professor Lo Coco was involved in the expert panel for the [European LeukemiaNet](#) (ELN), which recently [published](#) updated recommendations for the management of patients with APL in the front-line and relapsed settings.

Professor Lo Coco received the Sapio award for Italian research (2014), the G. Venosta prize from the AIRC (2016), and presented the P. Stryckmans memorial lecture at the [Belgian Society of Hematology](#) (2017). Francesco Lo Coco was a member of the AML Global Portal's [European Steering Committee](#) (SC) since March 2017, providing knowledge and guidance on the developments in APL.

"Francesco was an exceptionally talented clinical hematologist who played a major role in improving treatment options for patients with acute myeloid leukemia. Amongst many notable contributions was his pivotal work which established arsenic trioxide as a major therapeutic advance in front-line management of acute promyelocytic leukemia. He also played a key role in the formulation of international guidelines which inform the treatment of this complex disease worldwide. Francesco was a brilliant example of how patient outcomes can be transformed through meticulous trial design and delivery and he was a greatly valued advisor and friend for a whole generation of hematologists. His inspiration, generosity and kindness will be hugely missed across the world"

[Professor Charles Craddock](#), Co-Chair European SC and Global SC member, [Queen Elizabeth Hospital](#), Birmingham, UK.

"Last year, he was granted the EHA José Carreras award for his outstanding contributions to the research and treatment of acute myeloid leukemia. The most recent contribution of Francesco relates to attempts to get oral arsenic available in Europe for the treatment of acute promyelocytic leukemia. He very recently presented a clinical trial to try to make this possible, which related to the application of bone marrow transplantation.

Apart from all the scientific achievements mentioned above, Francesco was a true gentleman and was appreciated by hematologists worldwide. It is so unreal to have to get on with things after this has happened.

He had a philosophical view on the world, was always very thoughtful, and a great friend for myself and many in the hematology community. It is hard to find words to express my grief of losing him. We will sincerely miss him."

[Professor Gert Ossenkoppele](#), Chair European SC and Chair Global SC, [VU University Medical Center](#), Amsterdam, NL.