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Obituary

In Memoriam; Pasquale Montagna, MD (September 11, 1950–December 9, 2010)



Pasquale Montagna, MD, one of the most outstanding clinical neuroscientists and great leaders of the world of contemporary sleep medicine, died prematurely on December 9, 2010, at the age of 60 after courageously battling cancer for almost two and a half years. Although Prof. Montagna lost his battle to live, his accomplishments, his dedication to neurology and sleep medicine, his drive and his enthusiasm will continue to improve the lives of many. He maintained his ambition to promote sleep medicine until the very end, proofreading (as senior editor) final chapters for the two volumes of *Sleep Disorders* (part of the *Handbook of Clinical Neurology* series) a couple of months before his sad demise. The untimely death of Prof. Montagna at the height of his career remains an immeasurable loss.

Prof. Montagna was born in a delightful small town in Muro Leccese in the southeastern part of Italy. He graduated in medicine from the University of Bologna in 1974 with a perfect score. Following his training in neurology at the University of Bologna, Prof. Montagna traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark to receive training in electromyography for one year at the famous Laboratory of Clinical Neurophysiology at Copenhagen University under the tutelage of Professor Fritz Buchthal. He later stayed there for one year following a fierce competition, winning the senior registrar position. In 1980 he became a researcher at the Bologna University Neurology clinic, participating in teaching, research and patient care. In 1992 he won the public competition for Associate Professor, and in 2001 he became full professor of neurology at the Faculty of Medicine, Bologna University. Following the retirement of Prof. Elio Lugaresi, Prof. Montagna became Chairman of Neurological Sciences at the University of Bologna in 2007 and he remained in that position until his death.

Prof. Montagna's research activity focused on clinical neurophysiology of sleep-related movement disorders, describing a new nosological entity propriospinal myoclonus at sleep onset. Bologna Neurological Center made the most significant contributions in clinical sleep medicine, discovering many new entities

including their neurophysiological aspects (e.g., nocturnal paroxysmal dystonia or nocturnal frontal lobe epilepsy, predormital propriospinal myoclonus, fatal familial insomnia, catathrenia, periodic limb movements in sleep, and others), and Prof. Montagna was part of all these novel discoveries.

Prof. Montagna contributed approximately 500 full papers in peer-reviewed and mostly international journals, over 227 presentations and abstracts and 59 book chapters. He was the senior editor of two volumes of *Sleep Disorders* (referred to earlier), which came out about two weeks before his death. This fulfilled his wish to be around to see the volumes in print! He also edited another book in 1993, *Fatal Familial Insomnia: Inherited Prion Diseases, Sleep and the Thalamus*. Simply compiling his many major contributions does not convey a sense of the man, and yet this must be done to convey the enormity of the loss in many other aspects felt by his colleagues who were privileged to know and work with him. His collaborators, one and all, admired him for his great intellectual gifts and human warmth. They also feared the rigour of his judgement, but above all they loved him for what he had taught them, learnt more by example than by words. I (E.L.) gradually came to glimpse the far-reaching breadth of his knowledge over the three decades we worked together, shoulder to shoulder, and on the occasions we travelled abroad to international scientific meetings. Reserved by nature, Montagna was modest and not one to talk about himself or his past or voice his opinion, being concerned more for the welfare of his patients and giving much of his time to his students, trainees and colleagues.

Despite his commitment to his work, he remained fiercely devoted to his wife and family. In one emotional moment he wrote to me (S.C.), "It is indeed a troubled time for me and my family – the latter is my principal concern; I have a wife and a 16-year-old boy, and we know how all-important our family is in our two cultures."

Prof. Montagna is survived by a rich legacy in sleep medicine, particularly the neurophysiology of sleep-related movement

disorders. At the time of his premature death, Montagna was the undisputed leader of the Bologna group, whose sense of loss and grief is left with an unfilled void. It will be a long time before we will see his like again. I (E.L.) remember Pasquale Montagna not only as a highly talented clinician and researcher, but a deeply human figure with a vast cultural knowledge. Not only did he love music and was a fine amateur flute player, he was also a linguist and an authority on Greek culture. He had an in-depth grasp of Italian and other European cultures and, remarkably, a profound knowledge of the great Eastern civilizations. Pasquale, my (S.C.) friend, although inside I am filled with tears, I live with pleasant memories, and I praise you for your passion for work, for constantly striving to help your patients, and for your unfailing devotion to your wife and young son. May your soul rest in peace. The sleep community remains forever grateful to you for your lasting contributions. Your legacy, your fine example and your teaching shall remain alive in the hearts and minds of all who had the priv-

ilege of living and working with you. Our compassion and prayers go to your wife, Flavia Valentini, and your son, Carlo Lorenzo, whose loss cannot be comprehended.

Prof. Montagna remained optimistic until the very end. A case in point is a quote from an email I (S.C.) received after his surgery and chemotherapy: "Today in Bologna is a beautiful day. The sun is shining and, as I look at the hills, there is a fresh air among the trees; let's hope the same for the future."

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