I am writing a note in tribute to one of our oncology research leaders, who has just left us: Giorgio Parmiani – a pioneer in immunology. The scientific community mourns him.

Parmiani was internationally recognised in the field of tumour immunology and immunotherapy. He was among the first to describe the immune response against differentiation antigens in melanoma patients and to molecularly characterise them.

In collaboration with other researchers, he promoted clinical and translational studies of anti-cancer vaccination in patients with metastatic melanoma and colon and prostate cancers, and was principal investigator of numerous clinical-translational protocols in onco-immunology. He authored/co-authored around 500 articles and more than 30 book chapters, which have been cited more than 10,000 times in recent years.

Parmiani was born in 1938 in Sesto San Giovanni, north of Milan, and he studied medicine at Milan University, graduating in 1964. He spent his early career at Milan's National Cancer Institute, where he was appointed Head of the Experimental and Clinical Research Unit, Director of Cancer Immunotherapy and subsequently Director of the Department of Innovative Therapies, as well as General Manager. In 2007 he moved to Milan's San Raffaele Hospital, where for ten years he was Director of the Immuno-Biotherapy Unit of the Molecular Oncology Division.

As an adjunct Professor, he taught Immunology at the University of Brescia, and Oncology at the Life and Health University of San Raffaele. He also established and headed up the PhD course in Molecular Oncology run at the National Cancer Institute in conjunction with the Open University (UK). Over the course of his career he worked and taught in universities in the United States, France, England and Italy. He was a passionate professor and a challenging partner in scientific discussions, and many of his students went on to distinguish themselves internationally.

Parmiani was a member of various national and international research associations, and served as President of the Italian Cancer Society (http://www.cancerologia.it/). He founded the Italian Network for Cancer Biotherapy and Immunotherapy (NIBIT) in 2004, serving as its first President.

His great scientific work earned him numerous awards, including the 2008 Richard V. Smalley, MD Memorial Award, given by the Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer.

Parmiani was also very involved in civic life. In 1987 he was appointed Deputy Mayor and Assessor (City Councillor) for social services and sport in his home town, Sesto San Giovanni. He continued to be active in the political and cultural life of the city, and for many years organised a Science Club in collaboration with the Sesto San Giovanni Civic Library.

A generous and sincere person in all circumstances, Giorgio was a scholar, a mentor, a worker, with great passion for politics, sport and for his many professional commitments. He was a charismatic figure in immunology and a great medical personality and a gentleman, who will be sorely missed by us all.

He leaves his loving wife Itala Cosmo and daughters Lara and Lisa.

The importance of a scientist as a leader is fundamental for the moral and psychological support of the community. Giorgio Parmiani was a special one.