

Francomichele Puca *in memoriam*



Professor Francomichele Puca passed away on January 8th, 2004, at the age of 64 years. His life was broken suddenly, much too early for himself, for his family, for his many friends and his pupils. He has been Full Professor of General Psychopathology and then Full Professor of Neurology and Chairman of the Neurology Department at the University of Bari's Medical School, in Bari, Italy.

During his long academic career, Professor Puca promoted a number of scientific and clinical initiatives, including the Headache Center, the Epilepsy Center and the Sleep Medicine Center of the University of Bari, which still stand out among Italian institutions for their originality and productivity. It would take too long to simply list all the activities linked to the works of Professor Puca, but let me just mention here that he has been the Director of the Interuniversity Center for the Study of Headache and Neurotransmitter Disorders of the Central Nervous System, which gathered units from many Italian universities, and President of the Italian Association of Sleep Medicine. One of the greatest contributions of Professor Puca has been in the field of headache. Under his presidency (1998–1999), the Italian Society for the Study of Headache witnessed an unprecedented growth and the birth of the *Journal of Headache and Pain*.

Professor Puca was gifted with a vivid curiosity and desire for knowledge that reached far beyond the scientific

domain and that led him to have an uncommon cultural background. He has authored over 500 publications, many of which have become classic works in clinical and experimental neurology. He distinguished himself for his comprehensive and original approach to scientific issues. An example for all, he has been in our country a pioneer of studies on the relationship between primary headache and psychopathology, studies that have begun to unveil the complex psychological underground in which headache often is deeply rooted. This intuition resulted in the development of a multidisciplinary study group, coordinated by Professor Puca himself, that conducted a multicenter study in thousands of patients from all the Italian headache centers to investigate primary headaches and psychiatric comorbidity. The important results of this research are now widely recognized by the international scientific community, as demonstrated by the fact that the revised edition of the International Classification of Headaches has included a chapter entitled "Headaches Attributed to Psychiatric Disorders". Professor Puca's innovative view went in the direction of bridging the gap between neurology and psychopathology, in spite of the consolidated academic separation between the two fields; this represents, not only in my opinion, the core of his legacy.

Those of us who have known Professor Puca personally have had the privilege to also appreciate his human qualities, his respect for friendship and his joy for life. Francomichele was a real gentleman, in his everyday life as well as in the harsh and sometimes ruthless academic world. He had a genuine enthusiasm for life that was contagious to everyone around him. His scientific meetings will remain unforgettable also for the pleasant and joyful atmosphere that filled each moment of the social events. The sense of hospitality, innate in Southern Italian people, in Francomichele was astonishing. In the occasion of one of the brilliant meetings on sleep medicine that he used to organize, he kept all the participants up all night under a breath-taking summer sky in a convivial event that would have made an ancient Roman dinner party pale and that, quite properly, he named "*Insomnia d'amore*".

Today, we mourn the loss of a rare example of *homo universalis*.

Personally, I lost a long-time friend to whom I always turned for advice and guidance, not only scientific. I received from Francomichele much more than I gave to him. I am honored to have been among the few close friends with whom Francomichele shared even some of his more intimate thoughts. I was impressed by how sincerely worried he was that despite his efforts he could not succeed in providing a future to those pupils whom he considered particularly worthy and of whom he talked as if they were part

of his family. It is to his family, his beloved wife Stefania, his daughter Valentina and his son Fabrizio, that we dedicate our sorrow.

Mario Guazzelli
Department of Psychiatry, Neurobiology,
Pharmacology and Biotechnology
University of Pisa
E-mail: m.guazzelli@psico.med.unipi.it