Professor Mario Stefanelli passed away in the early hours of October 19, 2010, due to the complications of a hemorrhagic stroke.

Even if he was seriously ill, the news took everyone by surprise, leaving his family, friends and collaborators dismayed and wordless. He was so lively, energetic and optimistic that it seemed impossible he would have gone away forever. Once before, six years ago, he had already won a similar disease thanks to his wonderful will power. So, his death seemed inconceivable. It is however impossible, for all of those who knew him, to forget his desire to talk, to discuss and to listen to anyone knocking on his door. He was a giant, both as a person and as a scientist.

Mario Stefanelli graduated cum laude in Electrical Engineering in 1969 at the University of Pavia, Italy. He soon became Full Professor of Automatic Control and later of Bioengineering, Medical Informatics and Artificial Intelligence in Medicine. His great passion for bioengineering made him a founding member of the Master's Degree and PhD Program in Bioengineering at the University of Pavia. Students have cherished him for his dedication and mentorship. In the same University, he gave important contributions to the mathematical modelling of erythropoiesis, using both quantitative methods and qualitative simulation methods, with applications to the diagnosis of anaemia. His specific interest to the problem of diagnostic reasoning motivated him to start a new research activity in the area of decision support systems and artificial intelligence in medicine. After a visit to the Casimir Kulikowski's labs at Rutgers University, Mario Stefanelli opened a Medical Informatics Labs at the University of Pavia, which soon became a leading laboratory worldwide.

First, the expert systems Anemia and Neoanemia were developed and tested, then the GAMES (General Architecture for Medical Expert Systems) European project gave rise to a new epistemological model of medical reasoning, including diagnosis, therapy planning and monitoring. The Medical Informatics Labs started to broaden their interests, including intelligent agents, probabilistic reasoning, temporal reasoning, telemedicine. In the last part of his scientific career, Prof. Stefanelli has devoted noteworthy efforts to the design of methods and tools able to support the entire process of patients' care. For this reason, he first studied the role of electronic medical records empowered by clinical guidelines, and second the impact of workflow systems in health care. In this context he coined the term "careflow" to denote all activities related to patient's care, which can be conveniently optimized by means of information-based solutions. He finally proposed to extend the careflow concept to manage continuity of care through the idea of "service flows".

He was a researcher, but he always promoted and supported technology transfer. His commitment to put research results into practice led to stable collaborations with several healthcare organisations, where the systems developed in his labs are currently implemented. During the last years he was working on the project of the Pavia technology park, which he thought as the crowning achievement of his career.

The entire medical informatics community sorely misses Prof. Stefanelli, a warm human being and a good friend to so many of us. We enjoyed very good times working together, learning from his great vigour and intelligence.

Our thoughts, our memories and our prayers are for you, Mario.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge Marco Tornelli for his help in revising the early versions of the paper.

Riccardo Bellazzi and Silvana Quaglini
Dipartimento di Informatica e Sistemistica, Università di Pavia, Italy