

The Memory of a Teacher and a Surgeon: Paolo Innocenti (1945–2025)

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Paolo Innocenti has been a former student of the esteemed Professor Giuseppe Gozzetti, and began his journey in Abruzzo following the establishment of the School of Medicine at the "Free G. d'Annunzio" University, in Chieti, as decreed by the Official Gazette No. 38 of February 1975, referencing Presidential Decree No. 785 of 31 October 1974, with introduced amendments to the statute of the "Free G. d'Annunzio" University. Since 1988, he has served at the Medical School of Chieti as a Professor of Surgery. Under his leadership, the School of Specialization in General Surgery and the Surgical Department of the ASL2 Lanciano-Vasto-Chieti achieved remarkable progress and earned international recognitions. Professor Innocenti remained at the forefront of advancements in surgical technology, oncology, and basic research. In 2000, he played a key role in evaluating and securing authorization for liver transplantation at Chieti Hospital. By 2008, under his guidance, the Surgical Unit of Chieti was officially recognized by the Regional Council of Abruzzo and the Regional Health Agency as a reference center for liver cancer treatment. In May 2009, he successfully organized the National Congress of the Italian Society of Surgery, titled "The Reasons for Surgery: From the Pride of the Profession to the Challenge of New Complexities", drawing

around 500 Italian surgeons. During 2010–2012, Professor Innocenti served as a councilor of the Italian Society of Surgery and president of the quality control and verification commission. He strongly advocated for surgeon accreditation to enhance patient safety, as documented in the publication *Safety in the Operating Room: From Non-Technical Skills to Surgeon Accreditation*, commissioned by the Italian Society of Surgery. His passion for hepatobiliary surgery and minimally invasive techniques made him one of the pioneers of laparoscopic surgery in the early 1990s. His visionary approach fostered collaboration between Tokyo and Chieti in liver cancer treatment, culminating in an agreement between the School of Medicine at "G. d'Annunzio" University and Kitasato University of Tokyo. This initiative enabled students, postgraduates and professors to engage in academic exchanges. A significant milestone was reached in 2011 when Professor Masatoshi Makuuchi of Tokyo delivered a *lectio magistralis* on "The Development of Liver Surgery in the Last 30 Years". In 2012, Professor Innocenti facilitated a partnership between "G. d'Annunzio" University and the Hashemite University in Zarqa, Jordan, to promote academic and cultural exchanges. The following year, he organized the "Hepatobiliary Surgery: Up to Date" conference, during which Professor Myron Schwartz, Director of Oncological Surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, announced a collaborative agreement between the University of Chieti and Mount Sinai Hospital in New York for liver cancer surgery. In 2014, he performed the first robotic surgery for stomach cancer in Abruzzo. Under his leadership, the School of Surgery in Chieti, alongside the Medical School of Pavia, was recognized as Italy's leader in internationalization, innovation, and surgical education, both in the number and variety of procedures performed by residents. In 2015, he spearheaded the national academic congress *Surgeons: Actors of the Future*, celebrating 40 years of surgical training at Chieti. Reflecting on this legacy, he stated: "This is the future, built upon the 40-year history of our School, where the mission of transmitting knowledge and ethics to future generations remains unchanged." The same year, he actively promoted the course *Safety in Surgery: Teamwork and Risk Management in Emergency Situations - Training*

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in *Simulation for Critical Events in Complex Systems*. Professor Innocenti's residents and colleagues were like a second family to him, and he remained a tireless mentor, supporting their academic and professional growth through international programs. His deep attachment to his homeland, Romagna, was a constant in his personal life, as was his love for his wife, Adele. In June 2016, he procured the first laparoscopic surgery simulator for Chieti and launched specialized training programs for residents. His dedication to medical simulation reached its peak with the congress *Simulation in Medical Education: From Medical Schools to Health Professions*, offering students and specialists the opportunity to master complex procedures in a risk-free environment. Through his unwavering commitment, he brought prestige and international recognition to the University and Hospital of Chieti. In November 2016, he stepped down from its role as Director of the Surgical Department and the School of Specialization in General Surgery. An accomplished author of scientific publications and books, he devoted himself to clinical, oncological and molecular re-

search, fostering continuous knowledge exchange with international experts. In 2017, he became the driving force behind the Villa Serena Foundation for Research, ultimately serving as its scientific coordinator. His legacy is a testament to the impact of dedication, perseverance, and power of collaboration. Through his lifelong work, he demonstrated how excellence in surgery and education can be achieved through a combination of technical skills, academic rigor, and strong professional relationships. As your collaborators, it was an honor to meet you and work under your guidance. Dear Professor Innocenti, we are truly grateful for your passion for surgery. Following your teachings we recognize that *"it is our duty to preserve and keep alive the memory for without it, there is no future"*.

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