
LEGENDS IN UROLOGY

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I am a very lucky individual. First evidence for this were my parents. My father Walter came from a very simple family, certainly not wealthy, and was born in 1921 in Maranello, a small town which became later on famous worldwide when Enzo Ferrari decided to build his race car factory right there. The twenties were years right after the end of the First World War when poverty was everywhere in Italy. My dad wanted to be a physician and my grandparents did all they could to make their son's dream become true. After graduating in Medicine and Surgery in 1946 my dad followed his first mentor, Professor Emilio Trabucchi, a clinical pharmacologist, to Milan where he had been appointed chair of the Pharmacology Institute of the Milan University School of Medicine. That was an essential step in my dad's education as he spent several years in the lab doing preclinical research in various areas of medicine and understood that an essential requisite to become somebody is to learn the importance of asking important questions and finding the most appropriate answers. With that research background my father decided to become a general surgeon and had a long and brilliant career culminating in being appointed Professor and Chairman of the Department of General Surgery at the University of Milan School of Medicine. My dad had always been an avid reader of scientific articles and I learned from him that this was the first and most important requisite to identify brilliant ideas to be studied in research.

The more you read the more open your mind gets. Behind the success of a man there is always a woman and my mother Leopoldina was indeed crucial in keeping our family together and teaching us - we were three sons and one daughter - the importance of love and generosity. I will be forever indebted to my parents because they transmitted to me basic concepts like the importance of respecting the law and believing in justice, respecting the others' opinions while defending one's own ideas, and being at the front line of any battle if this deserves to be fought. Not only this, they indeed spent a lot of money to allow myself and my brothers and sister to attend the best schools in Milan: I spent eight wonderful years at the top high school that was run by Jesuits and still today my best friends are a few wonderful individuals whom I met during those years, fifty years ago.

Although I had always been very passionate with horses with an initial idea to enter the Veterinary Medicine School, at the end I thought that my best choice would have been to become a medical doctor and specifically a surgeon. I started medical school in Milan in 1981 and at that time in my country there were just too many physicians for the available paid positions. I thus understood from my first university day that I should invest all my energy in studying and always obtain the best grades. I soon realized that I had done the right choice with Medicine and I never regretted that decision. I was extremely lucky in meeting my mentor, Prof Patrizio Rigatti, a urologist, when he was 40 years old. He was a spectacular open surgeon and he had the capacity to see where science was going much sooner than the majority of his colleagues. He would frequently call me on the phone at 4:30 am asking me if I was still sleeping and challenging me with new research ideas he had thought of during his sleepless nights! I fell in love with Urology because of Professor Rigatti: over my entire career I learned so much from him; among many concepts he taught me was the importance of curiosity and enthusiasm which are essential requisites to become a star in your work. I also learned from my mentor's mistakes and this is a concept that I have always tried my best to transfer to my trainees: mentors do make mistakes! One must be good enough to recognize them and learn from them!

I graduated in 1987 and I immediately started my residency in Urology in Milan. My initial scientific interest was male impotence that was soon redefined "erectile dysfunction". I realized that not much was known about basic

physiology of penile erection and even less about pathophysiology of erectile dysfunction. I visited Irwin Goldstein in Boston and Tom Lue in San Francisco: in my opinion they were the two top clinicians, scientists and surgeons in the field and I learned so much from both of them. Of particular interest they did approach unanswered questions in a different fashion and they had quite a different organization of their daily work. Today, I personally consider Irwin and Tom as the founders of contemporary Sexual Medicine and I will never be thankful enough to the two of them. When back to Milan I became increasingly involved in the field of drug treatment of erectile dysfunction. At that time there were no mobile phones and I remember that I received a phone call in my hospital office from Dr. Pino Fioravanti, Chief of Pfizer Research and Development in Italy who invited me to participate in the very first advisory board meeting devoted to discussing initial data obtained with a brand new compound that did not have a name yet but only a lab code like UK and then a long series of numbers. I did not know what Pfizer was and I did not understand why they were calling me as I was only a 31-year-old unknown urologist in Milan. Dr. Fioravanti told me that at Pfizer headquarters in New York City they had identified eight investigators who had published what they did considered the best papers in the area of erectile dysfunction in 1992 and 1993 and that my name was part of the group.

I accepted the invitation, and I flew to Orlando Florida for a one-day meeting. In the meeting room I found Irwin Goldstein and Tom Lue and the top experts in the area whom I had met at previous scientific meetings worldwide. We were shown the very first data regarding sildenafil and the rest is history. I had the wonderful opportunity and real privilege to live very intensively the years when the phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors were developed. In Milan I was already working as a urologist at the University Hospital San Raffaele and I could use these phenomenal drugs in patients with erectile dysfunction due to diverse causes. I invested a lot of time and enthusiasm in studying the prevention of erectile dysfunction following radical prostatectomy for prostate cancer and also the relationship between the pathophysiology of erectile dysfunction and ischemic heart disease. By working with Prof Rigatti who at that time was by far the best known oncologic urologist in Italy, my clinical activity was increasingly liaised with cancer surgery and specifically prostate cancer. I realized that while at San Raffaele we were able to obtain good results with cancer cure and urinary continence recovery, the results with postoperative erectile function were not satisfactory at all.

I was a very avid reader of the scientific literature and I knew that two authors had been particularly prolific in the area of anatomic radical prostatectomy and had reported excellent results regarding the recovery of urinary continence and erectile function: Patrick Walsh in Baltimore and Hartwig Huland in Hamburg. I packed my bag and went to visit Prof Walsh at Johns Hopkins University for a week. At that time he would perform two radical prostatectomies per day three times per week and thus I did watch him doing six cases. I distinctly remember myself entering Prof Walsh's operating theatre for the first time. He was not yet there but the anesthetist was doing the spinal anesthesia on his patient. We had always used general anesthesia in our radical prostatectomy patients in Milan and that was the very first difference I noticed. Prior to Prof Walsh's entrance in the theatre I had already filled ten pages of my notebook detailing everything new I was seeing. That was one of the most important lessons that I learned on that day: be humble and recognize that many colleagues out in the world are doing things much better than you do! I think that Prof Walsh understood that my interest was genuine and he did teach me everything he knew about how to obtain the best surgical results with radical prostatectomy. I went back home and tried to apply the same technique on my patients. I changed the surgical instruments, I changed the headlight, I changed the anesthesia protocol including intraoperative pressure control and fluid infusions.

After six months I went back to Baltimore and spent another couple of weeks there. I had further specific questions in my mind and wanted to understand why I was making mistakes and my results were not as good as expected. That second experience was of outstanding importance for me. After another six-month period of personal experience in Milan when I finally started to see positive results I went back to Baltimore for the third round of direct experience with Prof Walsh in his operating theatre. I still remember with joy the conversations I had with him over time and the teaching that he transmitted to me. I would like to share with the readers one of the most important, still today: be careful with live surgery demonstrations outside of your hospital! Be ready to host at your own place in the best possible way those who want to learn from you in the operating theatre and show them your technique on a patient you consider being the ideal candidate for the operation! I still talk quite often to Prof Walsh and I consider him one of my most influential mentors. In Hamburg I discovered a surgical approach to

the prostate that was very different from the Johns Hopkins technique. With Prof Huland I got organized very similarly to Baltimore the only difference being the length of the flight, 90 minutes versus 10 hours! In Hamburg Prof Huland allowed me to scrub in his cases and assist him in first person! That was a significant honor and a wonderful experience but I could not write notes and I thus concentrated to memorize every single surgical detail, which I then wrote in my notebook at the end of the day! Prof Huland had developed the high endopelvic fascia incision with his open technique and at the same time Prof Mani Menon in Detroit had done the same thing with the robot-assisted technique! During the following months I went back to Hamburg twice more until I was convinced I had actually learned the principles and all details of Prof Huland's technique. Over the following months I fused together what I had learned in the USA and Germany and put together my own personal technique which I published later on in *European Urology*, The Platinum Journal. A year later I found my article cited in the chapter written by Prof Walsh in the *Campbell's Urology Textbook*! That was an emotion that I will never forget!

When the DaVinci hurricane came in, I understood that this would have been a change forever. I went to visit Dr. Menon in Detroit and we became friends. I learned so much from him and not only in relation to his surgical expertise. One concept above all: the patient must be explained that undergoing a surgical procedure implies going through a "program" composed of many pre-intra- and post-operative steps! This must be clearly explained in the informed consent form! When I met Prof Menon I had just become Editor-in-Chief of *European Urology* and I have lovely memories of myself and Prof Menon discussing manuscripts and how to make them ready for publication.

I was also very lucky when I first met Prof Claude Schulman who was the founding editor of *European Urology* and who proposed me to become Section Editor of the Journal. That was my real passion and when he decided to leave his office I decided to run to be his successor and proposed my plan to the Executive Committee of the European Association of Urology. For whatever reason I was finally appointed and with a wonderful team of young and energetic editors we took the impact factor from 2.5 to more than 14! I was really lucky also at that time because I met by pure chance Ms. Cathy Pierce whom I hired to be the managing editor of the Journal. Without Cathy I would have never been able to build the success of the Journal and I am so happy to see that she is still the left ventricle of the current Editor-in-Chief Prof Alberto Briganti who has been one of my most talented mentees since he was a medical student at San Raffaele University.

Finally I was very lucky for two more things: my trainees and my own family.

I am convinced that in our jobs we may have only one legacy which is represented by our trainees. Whatever one can achieve in life, sooner or later it will suffer the proof of time. Those who will follow us will spread the principles learned from us and will carry forward our name. I think that at San Raffaele I was privileged to create a group of fantastic individuals: clinicians, scientists and in general wonderful human beings. While today we are still a very young group, I am delighted to mention those who are already professors and chairs of Urology at different Universities: Andrea Salonia and Alberto Briganti at San Raffaele University in Milan, Andrea Gallina and Nicola Fossati at University of Italian Switzerland in Lugano, Federico Dehò and Paolo Capogrosso at University of Insubria in Varese, Nazareno Suardi at University of Brescia and Richard Naspro at University of Pavia. I should name dozens of other wonderful mentees and I apologize profusely for not doing so but the list is just too long. Their names are well known to the readers of this prestigious journal because of their numerous top publications.

Lastly I was so lucky to meet my wife Alessandra whom I convinced to marry me 34 years ago and who gave me two wonderful daughters Virginia and Angelica. Today part of my beautiful family is also Romeo a wonderful golden retriever who is one of the best joys of my life! My family has always been my first refuge where to recharge the batteries and without them I would be nobody.

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