# In Memoriam

Salvatore De Vita, *MD*
*1963-2025*

On January 20, 2025, the global rheumatology and immunology communities were deeply saddened by the passing of Prof. Salvatore De Vita.

Born in Udine on November 9, 1963, he obtained his MD degree at the University of Trieste in 1988. Then he completed his training first as a fellow in Allergology and Clinical Immunology at the University of Pisa, under the supervision of Stefano Bombardieri, and later as a fellow in Rheumatology at the University of Chieti. After a period in the Immunology Laboratory at the National Cancer Institute in Aviano, he joined the Department of Medicine at the University of Udine, directed at that time by Gianfranco Ferraccioli where he spent the rest of his academic career. Associate Professor of Rheumatology and Director of the Rheumatic Diseases Unit since 2003, he was appointed Full Professor in 2019.

His main clinical research interests were devoted to the study of the clinical and immunological aspects of inflammatory arthritis and of systemic autoimmune diseases, particularly mixed cryoglobulinaemia and Sjögren's disease. With over 300 publications in peer-reviewed journals, Salvatore De Vita reached an outstanding scientific profile, and Udine became an internationally recognised reference centre. Among his scientific contributions, his work on the role of B-cells in the pathogenesis of systemic rheumatic diseases is of particular relevance.

The group of Udine was among the first to use rituximab in the management of rheumatoid arthritis, demonstrating the efficacy of a B-cell depleting therapy in this condition at a time when research was largely focused on the role of T-cells in the pathogenesis of this condition.

While at the National Cancer Institute in Aviano, where he worked as a researcher, he focused his studies on the process of lymphomagenesis. His work on both Sjögren's disease and mixed cryoglobulinaemia identified the B-cell clones driving this complication and clarified risk predictors for the development of lymphoma. These studies were the groundwork for the application of the B-cell depleting therapy in Sjögren's disease and mixed cryoglobulinaemia. He coordinated the first multicentre randomised controlled trial aimed at evaluating the efficacy and safety of rituximab on cryoglobulinaemic vasculitis. In collaboration with French colleagues, he extended the use of belimumab to the management of Sjögren's disease and was the first to propose the combination of this drug with other B-cell therapies.

Together with his research activity, his expertise was of the utmost relevance in the preparation of the classification criteria for Sjögren's disease in 2002 in collaboration with the group of Pisa and in the development of the classification criteria for cryoglobulinaemic vasculitis in 2011. In 2020, with Athanasios Tzioufas he coordinated the HarmonicSS project, the first large scientific study on Sjögren's disease sponsored by the European Community in the framework of the Horizon 2020 Program.

As a recognition of his contribution and international reputation, he was invited to organise the 15th International Symposium on Sjögren's disease, held in Rome in 2022.

Finally, Salvatore De Vita was a historical member of the Editorial Board of *Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology* and was appointed one of the Guest Editors when this journal decided to publish an annual issue entirely devoted to Sjögren's disease, starting in 2018.

He was an outstanding and brilliant teacher, who inspired a large number of students and rheumatologists, and a skilled compassionate clinician, beloved by his patients.

Beyond his professional achievements, his passion and profound knowledge of modern and contemporary art reflected his innovative spirit and relentless pursuit of meaning.

His premature departure is an immense loss for his family, friends and colleagues.

We are all close to his family in this extremely sad moment. May this journey be an easy one, Salvatore.

*L. Quartuccio, University of Udine*
*S. Bombardieri, Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology*