

## EDITORIAL

# One-hundred-seventy-five years of Neapolitan contributions to the fight against the muscular diseases

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Following the suggestions of many friends who solicited me to spread the contribution of the Neapolitan physicians in the field of muscular dystrophies, I am proud – as Neapolitan – to participate, for more than 50 years, to the activities of Neapolitan Social Associations and Research Institutes.

The most significant events occurred in Naples or linked to Neapolitan researchers are summarized in Table 1. In such a list, the main event was the paper written by Gaetano Conte, in 1836, describing the first two cases of severe pseudo-hypertrophic muscular dystrophy, later called Duchenne muscular Dystrophy. Unfortunately such a paper appeared in a Neapolitan Medical Journal and, of consequence, almost completely ignored by the scientific community. It was quoted by Schmidt in 1839 and by Victor Dubowitz in 1978. My coworker, Vito Petretta, was able to find the original article of Conte in the National Library of Naples, at the beginning of 1986. Therefore a re-edition was made in *Cardiomyology* in 1986, causing a debate on the paternity of the first description of muscular dystrophy: Conte (1836), Meryon (1852) or Duchenne (1868)?

Nowadays, eleven years after the second edition in *Acta Myologica*, we decided to re-publish in this issue the original paper of G. Conte, because the young researchers do not know Gaetano Conte and the old have probably forgotten him. For people not familiar with the Italian language, a short English edition of the article will take place at the end of Editorial.

In order to remember Gaetano Conte, the *Gaetano Conte Academy* was established in Naples by my coworkers and I, with the aim to promote scientific progress and social co-operation in the field. In 1991, the *Gaetano Conte Academy* instituted the “*G. Conte Prizes*” to award scientists giving important contributions to scientific progress in the field of primary diseases of the myocardium and skeletal muscles. The first edition of the “*G. Conte Prizes*” was in 1991; since that date, they have been assigned every two years, in the occasion of the Congresses of the Mediterranean Society of Myology. The next *G. Conte Prizes* will be awarded during the X Congress of the Mediterranean Society of Myology, that will be held in Pisa, at the end of the April 2011. The list of the scientists who received the *G. Conte Prizes* is reported in Table 2.

**Table 1.** The main Neapolitan contributions in the field of muscular dystrophies.

<b>1836</b>	Gaetano Conte, a physician of the <i>Santa Maria del Popolo degli Incurabili</i> Hospital in Naples, described the first case of muscular dystrophy - that he called " <i>scrofolia muscolorum</i> " - in two brothers in an article published in the journal "Annali degli Ospedali Incurabili".
<b>1967</b>	The Neapolitan Branch of the Italian Muscular Dystrophy Association (UILDM) was created in Naples by Giovanni Nigro and Lucia Comi.
<b>1981</b>	The Journal <i>Cardiomyology</i> – later entitled <i>Acta Myologica</i> – was founded in Naples by Lucia Comi and Giovanni Nigro.
<b>1986</b>	The original paper of G. Conte was re-published in <i>Cardiomyology</i> and presented during the EAMDA Assembly, held in Gragnano (Naples).
<b>1991</b>	The <i>Gaetano Conte Academy</i> was created in Naples.
<b>1991</b>	The Gaetano Conte Prizes were awarded for the first time.
<b>1992</b>	The European Neuro Muscular Centre (ENMC) was created in Baarn (The Netherlands) by Giovanni Nigro, Ysbrand Poortman and Reinhardt Rüdél (see Fig. 1).
<b>1993</b>	The Mediterranean Society of Myology was founded in Ischia (Naples) by the representatives of 22 Mediterranean Countries.
<b>1994</b>	The World Muscle Society (WMS) was conceived in a dedicated meeting in Bologna by Victor Dubowitz, Luciano Merlini and Giovanni Nigro (see Fig. 2).
<b>1998</b>	A memorial plaque in honor of G. Conte was unveiled on the grounds of the old "Ospedale degli Incurabili" in Naples (see Fig. 3).
<b>2005</b>	The meeting of the G. Conte Prizewinners was held in Ischia.
<b>2006</b>	The " <i>Career Award</i> " was given to Giovanni Nigro, during the XI Congress on Neuromuscular Diseases, in Istanbul.
<b>2006</b>	Giovanni Nigro was elected by the World Federation of Neurology as the Organizer and President of the XII International Congress on Neuromuscular Diseases in Naples, on proposal of Valerie Askanas.
<b>2010</b>	The XII International Congress on Neuromuscular Diseases was held in Naples.

**Figure 1.** Signing of the constitution on 24 November 1992. From left to right: J. Baars, N. van den Berg, J.F.W. Donker, M. Rutgers, G. Nigro, Y. Poortman, R. Ruedel.**Figure 2.** Giovanni Nigro, Victor Dubowitz and Luciano Merlini at celebratory dinner after conception of the World Muscle Society in Bologna, Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March 1995.

**Table 2.** The Gaetano Conte Prizewinners.

<b>1991 - Ceremony in Naples</b>	
Clinical research ex aequo	V. Dubowitz - G. Nigro
Basic research ex aequo	R. Rüdell - E.P. Hoffman
Social research	Y. Poortman
Special prize	J. Wolff
<b>1993 - Ceremony in Naples</b>	
Clinical research	Lord Walton of Detchant
Basic research ex aequo	G.J. van Ommen - A. Monaco
Social research	B.M. Barataud
Special prize	Y.M. Rideau
<b>1995 - Ceremony in Marseille</b>	
Clinical research	G. Serratrice
Basic research ex aequo	M. Fardeau - D. Toniolo
Social research	L. Chiaffoni
Special prize	J. Melki
<b>1997 - Ceremony in Cyprus</b>	
Clinical research ex aequo	L. Rowland - I. Hausmanowa-Petrusewicz
Basic research ex aequo	F. Tomé - V. Nigro
Special prize	L. Middleton
<b>1999 - Ceremony in Barcelona</b>	
Clinical research ex aequo	K. Engel - A.G. Engel
Basic research ex aequo	S. Di Mauro - V. Askanas
Social research	O. Sinanovic
<b>2000 - Ceremony in Capri</b>	
Clinical research ex aequo	B.A. Kakulas - A.E.H. Emery
Basic research ex aequo	L.P. Kunkel - K.P. Campbell
Social research ex aequo	C. Ozdemir - A. Esworthy
Special prize	L.I. Comi - E. Ozawa
<b>2002 - Ceremony in Corfu</b>	
Clinical research ex aequo	M. Dalakas - H. Sugita
Basic research	K. Davies
Social research ex aequo	F. Hentati - P. Serdaroglu
Special prize	L. Politano
<b>2004 - Ceremony in Ephesus</b>	
Clinical research ex aequo	C. Angelini - G. Karpati
Basic research	F. Lehmann-Horn
Social research	J. Miller
Special prize	F. Deymeer
<b>2007 - Ceremony in Djerba</b>	
Clinical research ex aequo	F. Muntoni - M. Osawa
Basic research	J. Newsom-Davis
Social research	A. Fontana
<b>2009 - Ceremony in Cyprus</b>	
Clinical Research	K. Bushby
Basic research	M. Zeviani
Social research	G. Scheuerbrandt



**Figure 3.** The memorial plaque in honor of G. Conte unveiled on the grounds of the old “Ospedale degli Incurabili” in Naples.

I cannot conclude this editorial without any comment on the XII Congress on Neuromuscular Diseases, held in Naples from 17 to 23 July 2010. The Congress was very successful, attracting more than 1500 participants, from 45 Countries in the World. Its realization couldn't be possible without the hard work of two friends, Valerie Askanas from Los Angeles – President of the Scientific Committee – who warmly has supported Naples as the venue of the Congress, and Luisa Politano – Secretary of the Scientific Committee – who was leader in the scientific and organizational activities. Moreover my memories are for Lucia Comi, who started the organization of the Congress but left us too early, and Orlando Paciello, Secretary of the Organizer Committee, Serenella Papparella, Antonio Toscano, Simone Sampaolo, Vincenzo Nigro, Luigi Perrotta and Antonio Lavezza.

The Congress started with a sumptuous opening ceremony in the Royal Palace of Naples, during which Lord John Walton of Detchant and Alan E. H. Emery gave a *honorary lecture* (Fig. 4).

The Congress program included twenty plenary lectures by the following outstanding speakers, well known in the field of neuromuscular diseases – S. Di Mauro, C. Angelini, V. Askanas, A. Vincent, S. Appel, I. Nishino, K. Bushby, M. Shy, F. Muntoni, E. Nobile-Orazio, R. Griggs, J. Melki, E.P. Hoffman, C. Thornton, F. Lochmüller, Frank Lehmann-Horn, K. Campbell, G. Novelli, M. Dalakas and M. Pandolfo. Beside, the Congress program included 5 teaching courses, well organized by Antonio Toscano, a Wanda Session, organized by Ysbrand Poortman, Alan Bretag, Anna Ambrosini and Cira Solimene, 28



**Figure 4.** Welcome Dinner in the court of the Naples Royal Palace.

symposia, 69 platform presentations, 10 “*Meet the professor*” and 17 *Poster sessions*, all characterized by discussions of high scientific level.

The main social event was the Gala Dinner, organized in the wonderful frame of the *Meridiana Hall*, in the National Archeological Museum.

At the end of the Congress Valerie Askanas and Luisa Politano chaired the “Late breaking news” session, and the summary of the scientific highlights. The Congress was ended by the handover of the ICNMD to the 2014 host Claude Desnuelle from Nice.