
CORRESPONDENCE

Remembering Enzo Boncompagni, a Friend and Fan of THI

To the Editor:

A dear friend of mine, Dr. Enzo Boncompagni of Italy, died in 2017. Although he never practiced cardiology in Houston, he was a great fan of the Texas Heart Institute. I'm inspired to present some words of remembrance about his life and unique personality.

Warm, generous, and motivated to make a mark in the world, Enzo became a medical doctor and chose hematology as his specialty. However, he soon became disenchanted and redirected his interests toward cardiology. During his specialty training at the University of Pisa, he faced opposition to his instinctive downplaying of basic objective findings in favor of seemingly outlandish theories about the cause, process, and prognosis of heart conditions. Talking with his patients was always his primary basis for establishing diagnoses and choosing therapeutic interventions, and his decisions were typically practical and correct.

Enzo first came to Houston in 1976, to present an unusual case to Drs. Robert Leachman and Denton Cooley. He was immediately intrigued by the Texas Heart Institute—its professional life, conferences, research activities, and people. He especially admired Dr. Cooley's surgical prowess—so much so that, when I started performing balloon coronary angioplasty, Enzo considered it interesting, but only as a prelude to routine surgical bypass “follow-up.”

For decades, Enzo visited Houston 2 or 3 times each year—sometimes with a patient, but chiefly to keep in touch with his friends at THI. He developed such close, warm bonds that the THI professional community awarded him a medal and a certificate of honorary Texas Heart Institute membership. He regarded this as one of his greatest professional achievements.

He loved Texas culture, considering it to be open, simple, and relaxing. He also enjoyed the countryside and, for years, visited Dr. Leachman's Somerville Lake ranch in early April. He eagerly and routinely took close-up photographs of bluebonnet flowers. Even back in Italy, Enzo's attire was “pure Texan”: blue jeans, cowboy boots, a thick belt with a large buckle, and a red bandana around his neck—never a regular necktie.

Enzo never practiced as a hospital cardiologist; his main laboratory was his office in Prato, Italy. It had the atmosphere of a tropical forest, with flowers, plants, birds, and other vivid souvenirs from his trips to the Amazon region. His office abounded with books, patients' mementos, letters, and ECG tracings. Once, when I visited him for consultation about a patient, it

took us 15 minutes to locate a stethoscope. We finally found it hanging under a talking parrot's birdcage. Unfazed, Enzo said, “I am sorry—today the office is a little disorganized,” and continued his presentation.

When Enzo asked me to join him in video-recording extensive discussions about cardiology topics in the Italian language for his patients and the public, I agreed. He loved the medical illustrations that I contributed to this worthy project.

Enzo later directed his professional efforts toward medical communication on radio and television. He developed a regular medical talk show and became nationally renowned, using his natural Florentine narrative style to present clinical histories with great clarity. In 2013, he published a book, *Cardiologia per Tutti* (*Cardiology for All*), a grand summary of his first 1,000 clinical cases based on his talk show. The book, 622 pages long, included a mini-encyclopedia of the main subchapters in cardiology. Enzo's passion for explaining medicine to a lay audience inspired him to create and include his own impressive collection of illustrations. This project exemplified his rich human compassion and his superior communication skills.

I had only one disappointment in relating to my special Italian colleague in cardiology: he refused to accept my ideas about takotsubo cardiomyopathy. I showed him my large compilation of cases and explained my theory that the condition is caused by a transient spasm that stuns the heart muscle. Despite my efforts and my 20-year history of publications on the topic, he wrote in his book that takotsubo cardiomyopathy results from catecholamine overload—the opposite of what I think. This is a testament to Enzo's strength of conviction: what he believed *was* the truth, always to be explained clearly and accurately to his students and his patients.

Enzo Boncompagni will be long and fondly remembered in many Italian homes, as well as several in Texas.

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