

Giorgio Brunelli (1925-2018)



Giorgio Brunelli was an eclectic surgeon being a great orthopaedic surgeon, a world pioneer in microsurgery and hand surgery, a passionate researcher in many fields especially in the peripheral and central nervous system and its plasticity. He is considered the father of Microsurgery in Italy.

Brunelli was born in 1925. The choice of studying Medicine came as a consequence and inspiration following serving in the Army during the war when he worked in a small field hospital.

He graduated in Medicine at the University of Parma in 1949.

Giorgio Brunelli had a very successful surgical and academic career. He became the Director of an Orthopaedic Surgery Unit at the age of 35, and became the University Chair in Orthopaedics in Brescia in 1971.

Brunelli's achievements were many in his pioneering work, such as the first total hip joint replacement in Italy in 1963 and the introduction of microsurgical techniques in Italy in 1965. In 1972 he was the first to perform brachial plexus surgery in Italy and the first to replant a total limb amputation in 1973. He earned a Honoris Cause Degree from the University of Wroclaw, and in the Eighties he focused on Experimental Research on the treatment of spinal cord lesions. He founded the Spinal Cord Foundation collecting money to support laborious researches on the anatomy and

physiology of the spinal cord and its chances to be healed after a lesion.

He was the ideal follower of the thoughts and teachings of his Italian and foreign Masters: Poli from Milan, Merle D'Aubignè from Paris, Bunnel from the U.S.A. as well as Böhler from Wien and Möberg from Göteborg. He also continued the contact and friendship with many other pioneers of hand surgery and microsurgery: Buck-Gramko, Chen-Zhong-Wei, Gilbert, Hunter, Meyer, Merle, Millesi, Morrison, Pho, Santos Palazzi, Soukakos, Sunderland, Tubiana, Tamai, Terzis, Urbaniak and many others.

He developed many innovative techniques in hand surgery and microsurgery. Among the leading ones: prostheses of various joints, metal and plastic materials for surgical use, microsurgical reconstructions of nerves and limbs, robotics and a closer relationship between orthopaedics and all the new scientific discoveries. Many of his techniques are still in use to this day: motor and sensory nerve transfers, ligament reconstruction of wrist instabilities, direct muscle neurotization, hyponeurotization in spasticity, CMC thumb instability and arthritis treatment, a novel technique for wrist fusion, muscle in vein combined grafts for short nerve gap repair, original brachial plexus neurotizations, ulnar nerve transfer to help tetraplegic patients stand up, etc.

In Brunelli's professional life, teaching was always a very important endeavor. As the head of the Orthopaedic Department at the University of Brescia from 1971 to 1997, he introduced the practical microsurgical courses which are still the basis of our present day educational activity in the Italian Society for Microsurgery. Brunelli also advised young doctors

to spend some time abroad in Fellowships to broaden their educational exposure.

He founded the Italian Society for Microsurgery in 1981 and was still the honorary President until his passing.

He was the President of the International Society of Microsurgery in 1984 and President of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand from 1995 to 1998 and was nominated IFSSH "Pioneer of Hand Surgery" in 1998.

Giorgio Brunelli has performed over 25,000 surgical procedures, 3,500 of which with microsurgical techniques. He was the author of 466 papers in peer-reviewed journals, 30 book chapters and 10 scientific texts.

Besides his scientific and surgical work, Giorgio Brunelli was a successful athlete in various disciplines: fencing, swimming, and was the regional university champion of cross-country skiing in 1948. He loved vintage cars and as a gentleman driver he took part in various races and several MilleMiglia car races.

Brunelli loved nature in all its expressions which he used to portray with his Nikon camera. He also loved to paint, and calling him an amateur-painter is highly out of scope. Several exhibitions of his paintings and photos were organized in Italy throughout the years. He also published several historical novels and, by virtue of his intellectual passion for neuroscience, scientific essays were published, such as "From Neurons to the Self" and "Conscious Ego".

Profits from all his different passions were all channeled to his Foundation and research projects, which will continue following the path he has set.

Brunelli's work has been acknowledged and praised internationally. He gained recognition from Nobel Prize laureates, such as Rita Levi Montalcini who sponsored his candidacy for the Nobel Prize for Medicine for his contributions to Basic and Applied Research and knowledge of the C.N.S.

Bruno Battiston

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