

Obituary

## **Obituary: Prof. Laurentiu Mircea Popescu. Bucharest 1944–2015**

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I was deeply saddened and shocked by the news that Professor Laurentiu Mircea Popescu, a member of the Editorial Board of the Italian Journal of Anatomy and Embryology and a dear and precious friend, had passed away due to lung cancer on Monday morning the 3rd August 2015.

Professor Popescu was an exceptional scientist who was valedictorian of his graduating MD class at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest. He completed his PhD in 1971 at the Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest, and his post-doctorate at the University of Leiden in The Netherlands. He was Professor of Cellular and Molecular Medicine, University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, since 1991 and held numerous distinguished positions including being the General Director of “Victor Babes” National Institute of Pathology in Bucharest, Vice-President of the International Society for Adaptive Medicine, Fellow of the Romanian Academy of Sciences and President of the Medical Sciences Section of the Romanian Academy of Sciences. In addition, he was a member of numerous organizations including the American Society for Cell Biology, the International Committee of Histochemistry and Cytochemistry, the International Society for Heart Research, and the Steering Committee for Regenerative Medicine of the European Science Foundation.

Professor Popescu has been recognized for his work at an international level as indicated by his many awards, invitations to international symposia and as a speaker at world-class institutions. He received the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from ten different universities in Italy, Hungary, and Romania. His prizes include the Gold Medal of the Paris Academy – “Rene Descartes” University (1998) and the Gold Medal of the “Albert Schweitzer” International Academy (2002). He was elected by the International Biographical Centre (IBC) as one of the Top 100 IBC Health Professionals (2009).

Professor Popescu was the founder and still was up to now Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Cellular and Molecular Medicine, which has reached an impressive 5-year impact factor. He also was on the editorial board of numerous international Journals, among them the Italian Journal of Anatomy and Embryology.

He was particularly expert in electron microscopy due the fact that he had grown up at the same place where George Palade began his studies and researches. Palade went to U.S.A. and Prof. Popescu remained in Bucharest where he spent a lot of his

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time to find grants for acquiring the best and newest electron microscopes. He published more 125 articles in over 40 international peer-reviewed journals. The majority of his progressive, high-calibre research focused on the regulation of intracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  in smooth muscles through *caveolae*, the role of cGMP in vasodilation and, most recently, the discovery of novel interstitial cells - now known as telocytes - in the connective tissue. These cells likely corresponds to the cells that Italian people have named fibrocytes due to their oval body, poor in organelles, and the long, thin cell processes. I myself, as a pioneer scientist in the field of another type of interstitial cells, the interstitial cells of Cajal, was impressed by Professor Popescu's enthusiasm in the research field of telocytes and remember with honour and pleasure that I was contacted and convinced to collaborate with him on this type of interstitial cells. After having published a number of papers where Professor Popescu named those cells as interstitial Cajal-like cells, he suddenly appeared in Florence at my room and told me that the name of interstitial Cajal-like cells needed to be reconsidered. After a long discussion together with the colleagues of my laboratory, Paolo Romagnoli, Daniele Bani and Giuliana Vannucchi, Professor Popescu decided to think out of the box and preferred to call the term 'telocyte' on the basis of the name suggested by the Italian team: 'teledendrocyte: tele = far away, dendro = ramifications/branches/processes, cyte = cell'. Among different opinions and suggestions, Professor Popescu showed his leadership capacity and insisted on the name of telocyte as a term easier to remember and use. Soon after, Professors Popescu and I published a milestone editorial titled 'TELOCYTES - a case of serendipity: the winding way from interstitial cells of Cajal, via interstitial Cajal-like cells to telocytes' in the Journal of Cellular and Molecular Medicine in 2010, which officially announced the start of a telocyte era. His vision in the field of telocytes and more specifically in the relevance of these cells for cellular and molecular medicine became legendary. He was one of the first to realize that telocytes were located in many organs, to propose the existence of 'Telocytes/Stem-Cells Tandem' working in so-called 'Stem Cell Niches', and to identify the three-dimensional structure of telocytes. The Telocyte concept is well accepted by hundreds of scientists from more than 60 universities located in 30 countries.

Professor Popescu was an enthusiastic drive to inspire scientists and young generations, to spread the light for the development of other people's talent and to help anyone as needed. He inspired young scientists to become thinkers, creators, and explorers of new sciences. He motivated people to work with great care and publish articles with high standards, establish stable methodologies, apply new biotechnologies, develop new research program, and make themselves more visible and active.

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