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## Mario Plebani turns 70

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### Mario Plebani, “Maestro” in laboratory medicine

I cannot really remember when I first met Mario Plebani, since I was in my early school age and most of those early memories are typically lost in the mist of time. I can only remember that he was a young medical doctor, attending my dad’s lab in Verona. Soon afterwards, “former” Dr. Plebani moved to the laboratory of the University Hospital of Padova, to re-join with his very first “Maestro” and mentor, Prof. Angelo Burlina, who was director of the service of laboratory medicine there. For some years, at least until I became a university student and started to train in laboratory medicine, I lost contact with him, though I could still follow his outreaching career remembering from my dad’s words. It was not until the early ’90s that I started to see him more assiduously, during resident scientific meetings, and I began to appreciate his enormous talent as a physician, laboratory professional and, last but not least, as bright scientist.

The 25th of October 1993 is indeed one of the most tragic moments in history of laboratory medicine, in Italy and all around the world, since it was when Prof. Burlina suddenly passed away from a heart attack. All his fellows and disciples, including Mario Plebani, were shocked by this tragic event, and understandably struggled to find a new anchor in the world of laboratory medicine. Due to his past achievements, however, Dr. Plebani was nominated successor of Prof. Burlina as director of the laboratory of the University Hospital of Padova which is – incidentally – one of the most prestigious European medical schools. It is not without dignity that Dr. Plebani continued on Prof. Burlina’s

footstep, becoming his most valuable heir. As the time passed, I could see Dr. Plebani’s studies and scientific publications increasing year after year, along with the exponential growth of his national fame and international reputation. In early times, enzymology and gastroenterology were his main areas of research, though his intellectual versatility has allowed him to anticipate most of the trends in our field, first and foremost the contribution of diagnostic tests to the managed care (what is now called “integrated diagnostics”), along with an intense activity on reducing laboratory errors and enhancing patient safety. During that period he published one of his many milestones, “Errors in laboratory medicine” [1], which has been cited over 1000 times so far. In the following years I have seen his occupations and engagements growing exponentially. He has become President of the Italian Society of Clinical Biochemistry and Clinical Molecular Biology (SIBioC) in 2003 and, in 2005, he was finally awarded the well-deserved title of Full Professor of Clinical Biochemistry, at the same time when I became Associate Professor of Clinical Biochemistry. It is during that time that our personal and scientific collaboration strengthened, also because I had recently lost my very first guide, my dad Prof. Ugo Lippi, who died in 2001. Once we started to collaborate on many scientific and professional topics, he started to call me “little son”, which is a typical Italian expression mixing personal and professional affection. Listing all other achievements that Prof. Plebani has reached in the following days is unfeasible for space constraints, neither it seems really necessary, because “who does not really know Prof. Mario Plebani?”. Nevertheless it seems important to remember that he has become President of SIBioC for two other consecutive terms (2006–2007 and 2008–2009), and it was during his last term that he asked me to become the Chair of the Scientific Division of the Society, a role that I have then consecutively covered for over a decade. His double term of office as SIBioC President is a clear indicator on how Prof. Plebani had already become the shining light of laboratory medicine in Italy and abroad. His formidable intuitions, his political skill, supported by an incomparable scientific background have contributed to enhance his engagements as speaker at an incredible number of scientific meetings and chair or coordinator of several functional units within the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (where he launched the Working Group on Laboratory Errors and Patient

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Safety – WG-LEPS – and the incomparable project of Quality Indicators in Laboratory Medicine) and other national and international scientific organizations.

During that period Prof. Plebani has also received Gérard Siest's heritage, becoming Editor in Chief of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine. He achieved an incomparable success in this enterprise, more than doubling the impact factor of the journal during the past decade, leading it to the currently remarkable value of 3.595. It is not surprising that my scientific career had again crossed that of Prof. Plebani, when he asked me to join the journal as Associate Editor, in 2009. One of his last meritorious achievements, was his nomination as President of the School of Medicine of the University of Padova, a role that he covered between the years 2016–2019.

In this past decade, my relationship with Prof. Mario Plebani has broadened far beyond a scientific and professional level, and I have the presumption to consider myself exactly the “little son” he uses to call me. Now Prof. Plebani has reached the age of 70 years old, and he is indeed one of the most influencing personalities in laboratory medicine, worldwide. Listing all his achievements is really impossible, but there is perhaps one aspect that more than others would contribute to explain what he has been, is and will ever be, for laboratory medicine. More than any other that I know, Prof. Plebani is capable of merging science, profession and political vision, thus creating a harmonious synergy of these three essential domains. He also has another important quality. I am one of those who probably knows him better, from the inside, and I have learnt after more than 30 years of illuminating discussions and debates with him, that he has an incomparable heart. He really loves people and he has never betrayed a friend.

Few last words about the future. The age of 70 is indeed an important milestone in life, which coincides with the age of retirement in Italy. However, I cannot really imagine my personal life, as well as the entire profession, going on without the almost daily evening morning call with Mario Plebani, exactly as my dad used to make with him when Prof. Ugo Lippi was still alive. I really hope that Prof. Plebani will continue, maybe in different roles, to be our Mentor, Guide and alleged Father. Saying this, I would like to conclude with a huge thanks. Prof. Plebani, thank you for existing!

Giuseppe Lippi  
CCLM Associate Editor

## Reference

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When Mario Plebani was appointed Editor-in-Chief of CCLM, I had worked for some years in the team managed by Gérard Siest.

Mario arrived with new ideas and new goals, and gathered around him a dynamic group of Associate Editors with complementary expertise.

His ambition was to increase the scientific level and the international recognition of the Journal.

Indeed, due to his huge time and effort he puts in his work and his capability to recognize situations, he succeeded, with the help of his Board, to durably install the impact factor of CCLM largely over three and make the Journal one of the most recognized in the field of Laboratory Medicine.

Besides his scientific qualities, which are unanimously accepted, Mario is an outstanding manager, able to drive a team with rigour, but also with sobriety, providing a quiet work atmosphere, ideal to reach a common objective.

As Chair of the Scientific Division of IFCC, I also benefit from the expert contributions he has on the activities of the Division, where he was nominated as full member four years ago.

The 70th birthday of Mario is the ideal opportunity to celebrate him and to recognize him as one of the most influential colleagues of our generation in the field of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine.

Philippe Gillery  
CCLM Associate Editor

## Professor Mario Plebani, global ambassador for quality and harmonisation in laboratory medicine

For more than a decade, I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with Professor Mario Plebani. My first meeting with Mario was in 2012, where I had the privilege, as Scientific Chair, to invite Mario to Melbourne for the Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine's (AACB) 50th Annual Scientific Conference. The theme for the conference was “Towards Global Harmonisation” and Mario eloquently presented “Harmonisation – the complete picture” for the opening plenary lecture. This was followed by Mario's symposium presentation on “quality indicators from a global perspective”. This conference and the associated satellite meeting on “Method Harmonisation” became the inaugural events to the AACBs commitment and new logo “towards global harmonisation”.

It was our mutual friend, the late Ms Jill Tate as Vice President of the AACB Scientific and Regulatory Affairs

Committee, who was the local driver of harmonisation and helped entice Mario halfway around the world to Melbourne, Australia. It would come as no surprise to anyone that knows Mario, with his energetic and engaging persona, that he was a “hit” in Australia. So, when the AACB annual scientific meeting returned to Melbourne in 2017, we naturally invited Mario back. At this meeting he continued his global ambassadorship on quality in laboratory medicine and gave the Quality Assurance Program Plenary on “Detection and Prevention of errors in the time sensitive testing situation”. It was the following year that our dear friend Jill passed away leaving a gap in our hearts and the profession.

Over the last decade, the journal, *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine* (CCLM) has gained increased recognition “down under”, mirroring its growing reputation globally under Mario’s stewardship. Whilst, CCLM is the official journal of the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, it undoubtedly has global reach.

Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CCLM) and Mario himself have published many important papers in the area of quality in laboratory medicine, influencing our now globalised profession. Simply looking at Mario’s profile on Google Scholar speaks to his impact with >2000 listings, an H index of 105 and so far >6000 citations of his articles (to Nov) in 2020. These statistics, although an abstraction, lay claim to Professor Plebani’s significant and thought provoking contributions to the field of laboratory medicine.

It is my pleasure and honour to work with Professor Mario Plebani, a great scientist and advocate for the quality of laboratory medicine to support patient care. I wish to personally thank Mario for his kindness, professional support and generosity of friendship.

Wonderful Mario, I wish you a very happy 70th birthday.

Ronda Greaves

CCLM Associate Editor

## Mario Plebani – 70

I got to know Mario Plebani when I became Associate Editor of CCLM in 2008. At that time he was Reviews Editor for CCLM. In 2009 he was appointed Editor-in-Chief as successor of Gérard Siest and new Associate Editors joined the Journal. Since then I have had the privilege to work with Mario Plebani on the board of Editors. His major task was to rapidly form and manage a new team of scientists which was supposed to continue and expand the journal’s role in the field. Building on the long history of CCLM which was founded in 1963 the journal steadily increased its visibility and reputation under his guidance which lasts for over a decade now. For me the

most impressive observation was the large work-load Mario Plebani managed as Editor-in-Chief day after day, because the influx of manuscripts increased tremendously from the time he took over as Editor in Chief. This is only possible because he has an extremely good knowledge of the entire field of laboratory medicine combined with an excellent feeling for relevant topics and an outstanding work ethic.

Overall, I got to know Mario Plebani as a most knowledgeable physician scientist with a deep and honest interest in medicine and laboratory medicine in particular. For him, the patient is always at the center of medical action and research. At the same time he is a sincere, always most helpful and reliable colleague. You can always ask him for advice and similarly, he is not afraid of asking for advice himself if needed. I wish Mario Plebani all the best at the occasion of his 70th birthday and look forward to a continued cooperation with him.

Karl J. Lackner

CCLM Associate Editor

During the time that I have worked with Dr. Mario Plebani, I have been impressed with his passion and vision for improving and elevating the status of CCLM. He assembled and manages an editorial team that improves the quality of care that patients received through high quality publications in laboratory medicine. His enthusiasm for enhancing the lives of patients and alleviating human suffering is infectious. Not only is he a thought leader in the field but he is the most compassionate person I know. He values and encourages collegiality amongst peers. I witnessed numerous times his pain when learning that colleagues were either sick or had died. His leadership marries academic excellence with deep, sincere caring for his colleagues. I am so happy that his 70th birthday will be recognized. There is no way that his contributions (both intellectual and personal) to the field of Pathology can fully be articulated. I hope that the celebration of his birthday conveys the importance and relevance of Mario’s contribution to the field. Patients will never know how their lives have been impacted by Mario but his colleagues certainly will.

Deborah A. Payne

CCLM Associate Editor

## Mario Plebani, Editor-in-Chief, teacher, physician, scientist and a friend

I joined the board of Associate Editors of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine more than a decade ago practically at the same time Professor Mario Plebani was appointed the

new Editor-in-Chief. At that time I was a newcomer in a double sense; first, I had not served as an Associate Editor before, and, second, I am a medical oncologist with research interest in laboratory medicine rather than an established specialist in laboratory medicine like most of the other Associate Editors. I will always be grateful to Professor Plebani who helped me pass this difficult transition. It was important to feel as welcomed and supported as I did.

Like every other human enterprise, a scientific journal needs strong leadership. For Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine it was a blessing to find such a personality in Professor Plebani, who has been able to steer the Journal through troubled waters of publishing for over more than a decade. As a clinician I admire the profound knowledge in the basic sciences as well as the insight into almost every discipline of clinical medicine that Professor Plebani masters. I am constantly astonished by the breadth of the knowledge that is being continuously transformed into publications, including original papers, reviews, editorials or books. I had the privilege to collaborate with Professor Plebani on some papers and could observe the ease, creativity and inventions that characterize his writing skills.

In many respects Italy was the birthplace of the current form of science and culture. Professor Plebani is a true Renaissance man born from this tradition. Despite being a major opinion leader Professor Plebani has a precious gift of stimulating others around him. With natural authority supported by unprecedented knowledge and practical skills he is a perfect example of a team leader, whether the team is his department, medical school, professional society or editorial board.

Most importantly, Mario is a person with a big compassionate heart, great integrity and a friend. In the world that goes more and more virtual I enjoy every precious moment of the yearly Associate Editor meetings with gentle words and human contact. It is difficult to believe that Mario will turn 70, since I can hardly imagine anyone of younger spirit and energy. Time goes faster than we wish, sometimes so quickly that we may miss the occasion to say important things. I do not want to miss this opportunity to say thank you to Professor Mario Plebani for everything you've done for me, for the Journal, for the medical community, and, most importantly, for the patients whose plight you could relieve due to your dedication and your lifetime of hard work.

Bohuslav Melichar  
CCLM Associate Editor

## Mario Plebani – 70

Some years ago a colleague of mine told me that CCLM was in search of a statistician to join the team of Associate

Editors in order to strengthen the methodological quality of the Journal in terms of statistics.

I was interested and was happily invited to join the team where I felt immediately welcome. In the following years I learnt a lot about specific needs for statistics in the field of laboratory medicine. Subsequently I worked on the improvement of the statistical quality of submitted manuscript along with the editorial team and Mario Plebani as the Editor-in-Chief.

Year after year Prof. Plebani has managed to increase the scientific level and the recognition of the Journal. With the increase of scientific visibility comes an increase of the influx of papers and the corresponding work load. Due to his managerial skills and his broad knowledge Mario Plebani has been constantly able to handle this tremendous workload.

In terms of knowledge I was deeply impressed when he discussed with me the specifics of a paper applying Firth penalization for logistic regression. This is a topic which is certainly not basic knowledge in statistics.

I got to know Mario Plebani as a true physician scientist with the desire to improve medical knowledge for the sake of patients. Also I am grateful for the privilege to know Mario as a person and friend.

The 70th birthday of Mario is an opportunity to thank him and to express my wish of a long continuing and fruitful cooperation.

Peter Schlattmann  
CCLM Associate Editor

Prof. Mario Plebani joined the Editorial Board of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CCLM) in 2002, and became CCLM's Reviews Editor in 2005. As a result of his work and commitment as Reviews Editor, the number of published review articles and opinion pieces increased continuously.

His nomination as Reviews Editor was the beginning of "love story" between Mario Plebani and CCLM, and as a logical consequence, Mario was appointed Editor-in-Chief in 2009. Since then CCLM has become his passion. He has been working tirelessly to make CCLM the leading journal in the field of laboratory medicine and clinical chemistry. Right from the beginning of his editorship he laid his focus on papers of practical significance, clinical applications and daily routine in the lab, rather than on papers dealing with theoretical issues. He anticipates future developments in the field, which is reflected in his selection of articles for publication. Under his editorship CCLM's impact factor increased continuously, breaking the magic number of 2 already in 2010 (2.069), only 2 years after he took over CCLM as Editor-in-Chief. Another milestone was in 2012, when the

impact factor increased from 2.150 to 3.009. Since then, it has been increasing constantly. The change of the Journal's focus and the increase of the impact factor has attracted a growing number of authors, which has allowed to select the best articles for publication. The current rate of acceptance is 17%. It is impressive and incredible how fast and effective Mario manages the increasing number of manuscript submissions, which is also an expression both of his long-standing experience as editor and author of uncountable, highly cited papers and his broad and sound knowledge in medicine in general, and laboratory medicine in particular.

The success of an individual would be nothing without his/her team, but only if you are a good team player – and Mario is an excellent team player. The relationship between him and the editorial team is based on mutual reputation, exchange of opinions and regular communication. The relationship is not just collegial but it is true friendship. Mario leads this editorial team professionally, strongly, and wisely, with his huge professional experience and warm-hearted character. He is a real friend, always reliable and helpful, and always in the mood for a joke. He takes time for his editorial colleagues, for authors and reviewers.

Prof. Plebani is the engine of CCLM and one of De Gruyter's most important stakeholders. We are so happy he accepted the role as Editor-in-Chief 11 years ago, and we look forward to working with him in this position for many

years to come. We thank him so much for all his commitment and passion.

Dear Mario, we wish you all the best for your 70th birthday!

Heike Jahnke  
CCLM Journal Editor

It cannot be emphasized enough that Prof. Mario Plebani, who was already closely associated with CCLM as a Reviews Editor from 2005 to 2008, took on the challenge of the tasks of the Editor-in-Chief in 2009, in addition to his actual clinical and scientific obligations!

The expectations of Gérard Siest's successor were very high, but Mario exceeded them by far, also because he has succeeded in forming a team of comparably committed co-editors for the Journal.

Thus, De Gruyter is naturally proud to have CCLM, led by Mario Plebani, in its portfolio: a journal that is an undisputed reference for clinical chemistry and laboratory medicine.

We hope to be able to continue this long-standing, friendly collaboration for a long time to come!

Dear Mario, congratulations on your 70th birthday from a grateful publisher!

Wolfgang Boettner  
Senior Journal Manager, De Gruyter