

Dr Dario Mirabelli's death and the hearing on February the 10th, 2025

SUMMARY

- * Epidemiologist Dr Dario Mirabelli has died
- * Remembering Dario by Professor Benedetto Terracini
- * Afeva bids farewell
- * Next dates in the Eternit appeal trial Bis in Court of Assizes
- * New mesothelioma victims

Dr DARIO MIRABELLI DIED on Sunday February the 9th, 2025

Dr Dario Mirabelli, epidemiologist and former coordinator (head) of Piedmont's Mesothelioma Register (Renan), died in Turin on Sunday 9th February. He was 71 years old.

He was an expert witness in many trials and his testimony focused on asbestos and the onset of mesothelioma. In particular, the Turin Prosecution relied on his expertise both in the Eternit Uno maxi-trial and in the Eternit Bis trial, the appeal of the Court of Assizes being currently underway.

A serious illness led to his death extremely quickly, in a matter of just a few weeks. In mid-January he suffered the first symptoms, was diagnosed, and his condition quickly got worse.

The news of his death, which circulated on Sunday afternoon, was made public yesterday, Monday 10th February, in Turin's courtroom 6 where one of the hearings of the Eternit Bis trial was taking place, now in its final stages before the Court of Assizes of Appeal.

The Court decided to interrupt the hearings because, it felt it necessary to further investigate medical-scientific aspects before reaching a verdict. Professor Corrado Magnani was summoned for this purpose, and Dr Dario Mirabelli had not died, he too would have returned to the trial on Monday 17 February, alongside his colleague. Together they had worked and presented the results of their studies in the first trial and before the Court of Assizes of Novara, in November 2021.

Dr Mirabelli and Prof Magnani were born in the same year – 1953 - had studied together at university and had become epidemiologists carrying out studies under the guidance of their ' teacher and master', Prof Benedetto Terracini, at the time director of what was then called the Servizio di Epidemiologia dei Tumori Convenzionato (Service of Cancer Epidemiology for the Health service) of the University of Turin and San Giovanni Battista Hospital, now Cpo (Centre for Epidemiology and Oncological Prevention in Piedmont), which Prof Terracini directed until his retirement in 1999.

Dr Mirabelli arrived at the Cpo at the beginning of the 2000s, after a long period of experience at Spresal in Settimo Torinese.

He participated and carried out many scientific studies: the list of his papers is very long, many together with Professors Terracini, Magnani and other internationally recognised scientists in the field.

During his professional experience at the Cpo, he was in charge of the Regional Operations Centre (Cor) for Piedmont of the National Register of Mesotheliomas, which he followed meticulously, aware of how much the carefully gathered data, can contribute to scientific research aimed at finding a cure for malignant cancer caused by asbestos.

What can we say about Dr Dario Mirabelli the scientist? A well-prepared, curious, scrupulous researcher with the sort of self-effacement that makes the most authentic men of science aware of how small they are faced with the major issues. It was this intelligent and rigorous modesty that guided him in his constant activity of analysing in depth and comparing, with serious intellectual honesty and authoritative objectivity.

What can we say about Dr Dario Mirabelli as a person? The scientist, the countless studies, the valued consultations, the several scientific reports at conferences or in courtrooms give the measure of his professional skills, but as a man all we can say is that it has been a privilege to have known him.

He made himself understood with simple words, even when he had to explain difficult concepts. When challenged by his opponents, he reacted with the calm strength, courtesy and respect, with which he ended up determining the tone of the dialogue to his interlocutor.

Respectful of the thoughts and lives of others, deeply generous, a tireless worker who never jostled for limelight, Dario Mirabelli guarded his own feelings with modesty, expressed with a kind smile, without complaining about a fate that had been cruel to him and his wife Claudia when, just over ten years ago, they lost their only son, Luca, to a very rare disease when he was very young.

Having retired a few years ago, Dr Mirabelli had never stopped studying and researching. This absence will be felt.

He loved the people of Casale Monferrato and shared their human suffering. For the people of Casale, it is a sad moment: they knew how much they had received from him and had great affection for him.

The funeral will take place on Wednesday 12th February at 10.30am at the city cemetery in Turin, at 135 Corso Novara.

AS RECALLED BY PROFESSOR BENEDETTO TERRACINI (the text is as published on the CPO website)

Dario Mirabelli passed away on Sunday 9th February, at the age of 71. He had retired a few years ago, but was very much present in the daily life of the CPO - Reference Centre for Epidemiology and Oncological Prevention in Piedmont.

Dario had approached cancer epidemiology as a student in the 1970s. From the Ipca tragedy in Ciriè he had perceived the role of the working environment on health. After graduating, he

worked for over a decade as manager of SPreSAL (the Workplace Prevention and Safety Service) of the Local Health Authority of Settimo Torinese, maintaining excellent relations with the Department of Cancer Epidemiology and participating in several research projects, one of which measured the risk of work-related lung cancer in the Turin outskirts.

In 2000, he moved to the Piedmont CPO (Cancer Prevention Organisation), where he was in charge of the mesothelioma register. For the twenty years that followed, Dario and Corrado Magnani the responsibility of studying the effects of asbestos in Piedmont, both as scientific contributions and as expert witnesses in court, right up to the trial at the Court of Novara in 2021-2023 for the 392 deaths from mesothelioma in Casale Monferrato (the appeal trial is underway in Turin).

Under the headings ‘Mirabelli’ and ‘Asbestos’, Medline has 109 citations of publications with Dario as author. First and foremost, his work confirmed the notion that carcinogenesis - including that caused by asbestos – as a multistage process. A fair number of citations are letters to magazines, commenting on and criticising other people's publications, sponsored by industry, intended to pass off questionable scientific concepts, which could be used in court to exonerate those responsible for the exposures.

In Casale Monferrato, Dario played a key role in four different population case-control studies on mesotheliomas, which contributed to fine tuning the definition of the dose-response relationship between asbestos exposure and mesothelioma risk. For these studies, his ability to create a relationship of mutual sympathy and trust with the population of Casale was important, also in obtaining the cases and (above all) controls to be interviewed.

Furthermore, in the Balangero studies, Dario confirmed that chrysotile (white asbestos) can cause mesothelioma, disproving a concept favoured by producers (and often reported in magazines financed by them).

Some of Dario's literature reviews are a ‘must’ to understand the tortuous mechanisms of production of ‘fake scientific news’ which - unfortunately - can no longer be ignored by those who do research in epidemiology and public health.

Dario was also an important international researcher with numerous connections to the International Agency for Research on Cancer in Lyon, where he contributed to important projects and consortia. On a national level, he made a significant contribution to the development of the Mesothelioma Registry and the Nasosinusal Tumour Registry.

I had the privilege of working with Dario for over 40 years. We shared a model of scientific rigour and moral standards. Over time, our original teacher (me)/student (him) relationship was reversed: he taught me many things in recent years.

Dario (together with his wife Claudia) has faced painful experiences with courage and generosity. An example for all of us.

Benedetto Terracini

AFEVA (Association of Asbestos Victims and their Families) (Casale Monferrato)

‘To the family of our dear Dario, our deepest condolences and sympathy, from all the asbestos victims, the unions and all the active citizens of communities of Casale Monferrato and surroundings. Dr Dario Mirabelli has left us far too soon. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for his great and very valuable work in carrying out the most important epidemiological investigations into deaths caused by asbestos and other causes, including those in Casale, with the first ones in 1985-87 led by Prof. B. Terracini.

Great gratitude also certainly for the work he carried out together with a group of equally talented colleagues, for the Prosecutors in the Trials for the enormous massacres, such as for Eternit and others. A wonderful example of the choice of rigorous consistency in the work aimed at researching the causes and dimensions of workplace and environmental disasters, with the consequent scientific results. All this, always with a sensitive and friendly approach to human relationships and feelings. The way he was, as a scientist and as a man, gives us relief and hope in the face of the suffering and injustices that we often encounter in life.

Goodbye Dario, and thank you.

UPCOMING DATES OF THE ETERNIT BIS TRIAL

During the hearing that took place on Monday 10th February, the Court of Assizes of Appeal of Turin ordered a supplementary preliminary investigation.

The aim: ‘To examine medical and scientific issues to reconstruct the causal link in greater depth’. Cancerogenesis is the crux of the proceedings: to ascertain, that is, the link between exposure to asbestos and the onset of the mesothelioma that killed the 392 victims listed in the charge against the accused Stephan Schmidheiny.

Judge Dr Cristina Domaneschi has therefore set the following schedule:

Monday 17 February: expert witnesses; for the prosecution Prof Corrado Magnani, for the defence Prof Canzio Romano, for the plaintiffs Prof Gino Barbieri;

Wednesday 2 February, 11 a.m.: possible completion of the examination of the expert witnesses (Dr Edoardo Bai, for the plaintiffs); then the prosecution will offer closing remarks;

Wednesday 5 March: the defence’s closing remarks;

Wednesday 19th March: the defence concludes. The Court then retires to its chambers and should pronounce **the verdict** later that day.

NEW MESOTHELIOMA VICTIMS

In the time between the hearings of 8th January and 10th February, more mesothelioma victims in Casale.

On 15 January, 85-year-old **Elsa Chiabrera**, a well-known iron craftsman, died. Asbestosis had already affected his family: in 2013, his daughter Paola, a young mother (37), had died of it.

A few days later, mesothelioma killed another woman from Casale, Elsa Chiabrera: 80-year-old **Tina Calleri**, who had been an activist for the Afeva association for years.