

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### PROFESSOR MICHELE MASELLIS OF PALERMO CELEBRATES HIS 80<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY.



When considering the vitality and stimulating enthusiasm of Italian Professor Michele Masellis, one would hardly believe that he will be celebrating his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday this year; and it is impossible to describe briefly his work and achievements at both national and international level. But because Prof. Masellis is also well-recognized in the Czech Republic, where he has contributed substantially to growing international medical relations, let us mention just a few high-points of his career from the Czech point of view.

Michele Masellis was born in Triggiano, northern Italy, on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1935. He studied medicine at the University of Modena, graduating in 1962, and subsequently started specializing in maxillo-facial surgery (University of Genova, 1968) and plastic reconstructive surgery (University of Padova, 1970). In 1971, he moved to Palermo, Sicily, where he and his family have remained until today. There, he started work in the field of plastic surgery and, among new organizational activities, founded the first burns-centre in Palermo. In 1974, he was appointed Head of the Plastic Surgery and Burns Therapy Wing at the municipal Benfratelli Hospital, an appointment which lasted for twenty-nine years. He then served as Honorary Head of Plastic Surgery and Burns

Therapy at the municipal ARNAS Hospital, in Palermo, until 2008.

At national level, he served as President of the Italian Society of Plastic Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery, and was President of the Italian Society of Burns for several terms. He was active on multiple governmental advisory-boards related to burns- and fire-disasters in the civil protection area.

In the early 1980s, Michele Masellis met an exceptional colleague and friend, Prof. S. William Gunn, who was working in the WHO at that time. From that moment on, they linked their ideas, activities and energy, pioneering new paths in specific fields of medicine in various parts of the world. For almost four decades, they worked closely together, "shoulder to shoulder".

In 1983, Prof. Masellis co-founded the Mediterranean Council for Burns and Fire Disasters (MBC) on which he served as President until 2012, thence being appointed Chief Executive. Additionally, he was co-founder and co-editor of the *Annals of Burns and Fire Disasters* (ISSN 1592-9558), a worldwide journal on burns and the management of burn-disasters, now included in Pub-MED and SCOPUS scientific-data bases. Under the patronage of the Parliament of the Sicilian Region, Prof. Masellis established the *G. Whitaker International Burns Prize*, awarded bi-annually to the most outstanding senior scholars and practitioners in the field of burns-pathology.

In 1999, he joined his friend, Professor Gunn, in founding the *Brock Chisholm International Association for Humanitarian Medicine* (IAHM). Since 2006, this has been recognized as a non-governmental organization with special consultative status to the United Nations, with Professor Masellis as Director. He also co-founded and co-edited the Association's quarterly, the *Journal of Humanitarian Medicine*.

Professor Masellis' immediate relations with Czechoslovak medicine date back to the early 1990s.

It was he who, in a completely new world-order, truly „opened the door” for Czech and Slovak colleagues into western Europe. Thanks to his support, many colleagues, plastic- and burns-surgeons, were able to actively participate in MBC conferences organized in Palermo. Moreover, it became possible for Czechs to be accepted as associate members of the MBC, and their Papers to be accepted in the two above-mentioned journals as well as in other relevant publications. Prof. Masellis also deserves tribute for despatching the above-mentioned journals to Czech and Slovak burns-centres.

This fruitful co-operation grew and enriched both sides enormously. It was just and natural recognition that Prof. Radana Königová was awarded the G. Whitaker International Burns Prize in 1993; some Czech medical students and junior physicians were accepted on courses at the Palermo Burns Centre; Czech burns-facilities were also included in the international MBC projects dealing with prevention, education and training in the field of burns and burn-disasters e.g. COMETT II, LEONARDO, BURNET. Additionally, Prof. Masellis and his colleagues visited Czech and Slovak burns-centres, gave lectures at annual conferences, and held consultations with officials of the Ministries of Health regarding the development of systems for fire-disaster management and disaster-medicine.

In recognition of his activities and invaluable contribution to Czech – Italian bilateral, and multilateral international, co-operation, Prof. Masellis was

awarded Honorary Membership of the Czech Society of Burns Medicine, and also of the Czech Society of Military Physicians, Pharmacists and Veterinarians. Above all, in 2010, he was awarded the Commemorative Medal of the J.E. Purkinje Czech Medical Association, presented personally by its President, Prof. J. Blahoš.

Honourable Professor, dear Michele, we would like to thank you for all your work, collegial support, and the friendly relations developed between our societies which have been the hall-mark of the past three decades. Our successors, the younger generation of physicians, will assuredly continue to benefit from the legacy of your historical contribution to medicine, both in our country and beyond! On this the occasion of your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, we all wish you good health, happiness and the best in life for the years to come.



Leo Klein  
on behalf of the Czech Society of Military  
Physicians, Pharmacists and Veterinarians,  
and the Czech Society of Burns Medicine

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