

Remembrance

Alfonse T. Masi

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Alfonse T. Masi (born October 1930) passed away peacefully and comfortably in his home in March 2025 at the age of 94 years after a prestigious career spanning over 6 decades as an eminent American College of Rheumatology (ACR) rheumatologist fully dedicated to the study and education on rheumatic diseases.

Al Masi earned his medical degree from Columbia University, Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, in 1955 and subsequently completed residencies in internal medicine at both Johns Hopkins University and UCLA Medical Center.

In addition to his medical training, Al Masi holds a Master of Public Health (1961) and a Doctor of Public Health (1963) from the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health.

Throughout his career, Al Masi has been affiliated with the University of Illinois, College of Medicine at Peoria, where he served as a professor of medicine and epidemiology. He was awarded Professor Emeritus at the institution.

Indeed, Al Masi has made significant contributions to rheumatology, particularly in the areas of ankylosing spondylitis and rheumatoid arthritis, with over 220 publications to his name.

In particular, he pioneered clinical-epidemiological research of rheumatic diseases, and his epidemiologic orientation provided a framework for studying the causation of the diseases. Al Masi's work also helped define fibromyalgia from other painful disorders.

In 1999, together with his European colleagues (his "musketees"), he established a new and intriguing area of neuroendocrine immunology of rheumatic diseases (NEIRD) and founded at the ACR a productive study group. He organized several meetings and authored many manuscripts on NEIRD. In addition, Al Masi was an active member of the editorial board of several scientific journals in the US and Europe, including *Reumatismo*, the Italian Journal of Rheumatology, serving for a long time as an active member of the scientific advisory committee.

In recognition of his contributions to the progression of clinical sciences, Al Masi received numerous awards, including the Osler House Latchkey Award from the Johns Hopkins Hospital in 2017 and the Townsend Harris Award from the City University of New York in 2016. He was also a Master of the American College of Rheumatology, a title bestowed in 2000.

In addition to his clinical and academic endeavors, Al Masi and his wife, Nancy, donated 1.2 million dollars to establish an endowed chair in the Department of Medicine at the University of Illinois, College of Medicine at Peoria, underscoring their commitment to advancing medical education and research.

On this occasion, the Dean of the University commented: "Dr. Masi knows firsthand the importance of research and scholastic activity in attracting and retaining the best and brightest faculty physicians. In turn, our faculty educates and trains future physicians who go on to treat and provide care for innumerable



patients". After retirement, Al Masi did not leave research behind and said: "I want to reestablish my databases at home and with collaborators, so I can continue to work with students and junior faculty".

As a matter of fact, many of these young scholars credit him with the success in their careers and with their lifelong interest in research. Al Masi has been sorting dozens of binders of data from decades of research so new generations of researchers will be continuing his work. In a recent interview, he affirmed: "All I can say is that the effort I put in has been genuine and dedicated."

For his younger colleagues, he was a real "mentor and father", and his memory will always be linked to a mix of pure friendship and genuine interest in the progression of the clinical sciences without any limitations or prejudices. His friends agree that: "With Al we had a very special professional and personal relationship because he was always helpful, never arrogant, never evil, always peaceful and stimulating, and deeply knowing". Al Masi was always surrounded by his wonderful wife, Nancy, and four children, Dr. Christopher Masi, Dr. Anthony Masi, Amy Masi Schauwecker, and Maria Masi-Kammerer, with their large families and numerous grandchildren. The Italian origin of his parents (Lucania) was for him a further reason to come to Italy every time possible. We have all been fortunate to have spent a great deal of time with him when we had the occasion to meet and to learn his style of real "MAESTRO".

Maurizio Cutolo on behalf of all his friends