

Carmine Melino and the Occupational Medicine

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Key words: Protection of workers' health; prevention, safety in the workplace

Parole chiave: Tutela della salute dei lavoratori; prevenzione, sicurezza dei luoghi di lavoro

Abstract

This short article, which describes the significant contribution Prof. Carmine Melino made to Occupational Medicine, underlines the Professor's great interest in this field and his outstanding ability in combining the lessons of the past with the most innovative aspects of this discipline.

Introduction

I first met Prof. Carmine Melino exactly 20 years ago when I was in my fourth year of Medical School. Prof. Melino had just retired as a lecturer at 'La Sapienza' University in Rome, while I was already attending the Institute of Occupational Medicine at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome. Meeting the Professor was very important for me as it consolidated my decision to make Occupational Medicine my career, even though it may seem strange that it was a Professor of Hygiene who influenced my choice of a different discipline. In point of fact, Carmine Melino was not only a Hygienist, he was also an Occupational Physician in the true sense of the word. His scientific studies and research in both these fields enabled him to overcome the differences in the two disciplines, and his great involvement over a long university career resulted in him having a large following of pupils and assistants who still remember

his expertise. What struck me most about Prof. Melino's numerous talents and qualities were the humility, tenacity and great intelligence with which he was able to look beyond his times.

Personal Profile

Although, at first Professor Melino appeared to be a rather reserved, introverted figure, who was nevertheless quite sure of himself, as soon as he recognised true interest on the part of others, he was immediately willing to listen and help. I was welcomed into his home almost as a member of the family, and he not only told me about his memories of university teaching, but he also spoke proudly of his family and his personal grief at not having his beloved wife by his side during the last years of his life. Although he was 54 years my senior, all this enabled me to have a special relationship with him

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and to become his youngest assistant in the last part of his life, even if I had not been one of his pupils. In fact I still remember when the Professor decided that together with himself and two more of his long-term assistants, I was to be the Editor of what was the fourth and final edition of his most important treatise: “Lineamenti di Igiene del Lavoro” (Figure 1; in English: Key elements of Occupational Hygiene) published by the Società Editrice Universo in 2004 (1). I must confess that I got great pleasure from being able to assist him in that venture which witnessed the prompt publishing of a considerably larger and updated version (101 chapters and over 1,000 pages) of previous editions of the treatise. This work, and also the numerous articles and books published in the final years of his life, are a demonstration of the tenacious desire to impart both

scientific and humanistic knowledge (he was also a poet and writer) that encouraged Carmine Melino to overcome the difficulties and illnesses that ‘*living to a great old age*’ inevitably entail (2).

Prof. Melino’s contribution to Occupational Medicine

As I stated earlier, what struck me most about Prof. Melino was the great intelligence that made him constantly look to the future. His publications in the field of Occupational Medicine clearly demonstrate this approach. In the 1960s and ‘70s, Prof. Melino was already underlining not only the importance of preventive medicine in safeguarding the health of railway workers, especially by means of anti-flu vaccination and the use of protective creams, but also the need for alcoholometry, an issue that is still the subject of debate today, and of great interest for safety risk management (3-7). In the 1980s, his studies focused principally on occupational carcinogenesis, a subject that remained dear to him up to the beginning of the 21st century (8-13). However, he was also interested in progressive aspects of Occupational Medicine that were closely connected to technological progress in the world of work. For example, his studies on the definition of occupational risk, on video-terminals and teleworking (14-16) were to become, years later, the object of scrutiny on the part of legislators, and are still of interest to the competent physician. His early observations on Legislative Decree n. 81 of April 9, 2008, only a few months after it had been issued (17), demonstrate that his scientific activities and interest in Occupational Medicine never waned.

As I said previously, Prof. Melino’s eyes were set on the future. However, he never forgot the historical past as can be seen in the study in which he compared the way workers were safeguarded at the time of the Pharaohs with our current legislative system (18).

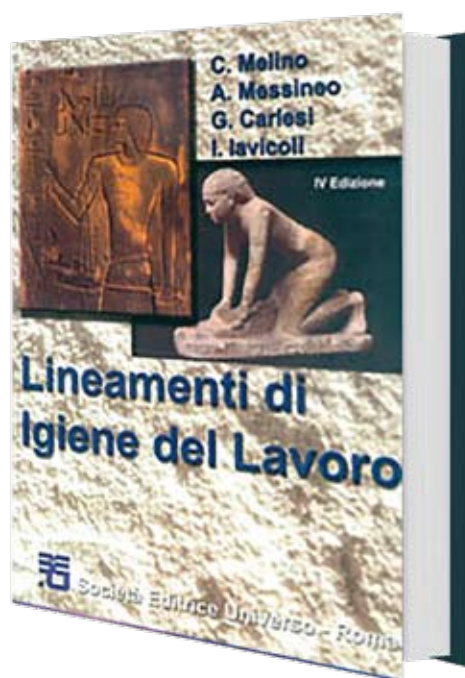


Figure 1 - Melino C, Messineo A, Carlesi G, Iavicoli I. Key elements of Occupational Hygiene [Lineamenti di Igiene del Lavoro]. 4th ed. Rome, Italy: Società Editrice Universo, 2004.

Conclusions

The most important lesson that Occupational Medicine can learn from Prof. Melino's teaching is that its attention must always focus on the worker as a individual person, not as a mere part of the workforce. On account of his valuable work in the sector, the Italian Society of Occupational Medicine and Industrial Hygiene awarded Prof. Melino an honorary lifetime membership. His work and commitment should serve as an example for all current and future researchers who are involved in carrying forward this branch of medicine.

Riassunto

Carmine Melino e la Medicina del Lavoro

In questo breve articolo, l'autore riporta l'interesse e l'apporto del prof. Carmine Melino alla Medicina del Lavoro mettendone in evidenza la straordinaria capacità di affrontare gli aspetti più innovativi della disciplina pur non dimenticando la lezione del passato.

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