

## Obituary

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# In memoriam of Rafael Molina (27 September 1955 – 26 July 2020)

In the early morning of July 26, 2020, there was a phone call from Spain. Jorge, one of the sons from Rafael and Marissa Molina brought the sad news that his father Rafael, had died that very morning surrounded by his loved ones.

Rafael cherished his family above all but his second love was surely his work as a devoted clinical chemist. Being a medical doctor as well, he combined both disciplines to understand the needs of the patients that trusted him their blood samples for detailed analysis and interpretation.

Most of us knew Rafael for his never ending efforts to find better understanding of the meaning of the tumor markers in the blood of patients with cancer. New biomarkers that could better reflect the activity of the tumor, or biomarkers that could predict therapy response or that could be used to direct new treatment modalities.

When I met Rafael for the first time at a congress of the ISOBM in Paris, we were both still inexperienced but we had the same philosophy and goals and we became friends, both professional and private. Many years later he told me that at that specific congress he had to present and had prepared a long row of slides, meticulously chosen and arranged to make it the best presentation ever. The moment he handed over the slide rack to the projectionist, all slides dropped to the floor and he had no time to rearrange everything. However, he did not hesitate and indeed gave one of his best presentations ever and only a very few people knew what had happened.

When he left for the USA to increase his knowledge, his wife Marissa and sons Jorge and Victor accompanied him.

After his return to Barcelona, Spain, he gradually took over the position of chairman in the clinical chemistry department of the University Hospital Clinic Barcelona. From this position he has spread his knowledge to many young doctors but he always managed to surprise also the more experienced colleagues with his approach towards biomarkers in general but specially in oncology. In his very own way he has contributed a major part to health care education in oncology and not only in Spain.

His active membership in the Spanish clinical chemistry society also led to the bi-annual conferences in Barcelona on the meaning and interpretation of biomarkers in oncology. Often more than 200 participants from Spain and beyond gathered for several days in one of the hotels in Barcelona and these meetings were of such quality and importance that the auditorium was fully occupied even until the very last presentations, with doctors and lab technicians from inside and outside Spain.

But apart from these famous “workshops” as he often called them, he was an active member and board member of the International Society of Biomarkers and Medicine (ISOBM) as well as of the

European Group on Tumor Markers (EGTM). In both societies he held the position of chairman for many years, and struggled to find ways for renewal in a changing medical society. Whereas in the early days of biomarkers the regular medical societies had only few members that were active in this field and found each other as doctors and basic scientists at the annual meetings, nowadays the impact of biomarkers has increased due to therapeutic developments directly linked to the presence or absence of specific biomarkers. This has also resulted in the development of biomarker committees in most oncological societies, reducing the attraction of ISOBM and EGTM as a platform of knowledge exchange.

When it became clear that he was ill, he did not want to bother other people with his situation and continued as usual with all his activities, and continuously developed new plans for improvement of the use and interpretation of biomarkers.

Apart from being a doctor he was a family man and a friend. Together with other friends and our families, we have seen the sun going down but also rising again from the sea to start another beautiful day where we maneuvered from breakfast to lunch and then to dinner with some historical sightseeing in between and a nice discussion before going to sleep again. It is that memory that will always stay alive.

With his death the medical and oncologic community has lost an important member who devoted his time and energy to the improvement of medical care for those who needed it most.

But most of all his family will miss that charming leader, husband, father and grandfather. In a period that we cannot travel to pay our respects I hope that our thoughts will reach out to those close to him so they can somehow feel the support of us all.

Marius Nap and Petra Stieber