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NOTABLE NOTES

Ferdinando Gianotti and the Papular Acrodermatitis of Childhood: A Scientist Against All the Odds

Federico Gianotti; Filippo Pesapane, MD; Raffaele Gianotti, MD

Ferdinando Gianotti was born on August 22, 1920, in Corsico, a small town near Milan, Italy (Figure). He came from a very poor family, and at age 13 years he worked in a tannery where he lost his left hand in an accident. The owner of the factory refused to use his car to take him to the hospital because he did not want to soil the interior of the car. After the death of his mother and sister from tuberculosis, he was at risk of dying from the same disease but was saved by having the phrenic nerve incised as the treatment.

Gianotti's father remarried a widow with 2 children. All the family members worked very hard at a small inn. With the help of the family, a small grant from the Italian government, and his revenue from being a brilliant bridge and poker player, he was able to study at the University of Milan. He wavered between medical studies and engineering. On the last day of admission, a huge blizzard hit Milan, and he chose medical studies because the engineering admission office was too far from home.

In 1954, Gianotti created the first Italian (and probably first European) department of pediatric dermatology at Granda Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico in Milan.

When Gianotti examined a child with a monomorphous erythematous papular eruption, he was unable to classify this patient according to any established diagnosis and suspected he was on to something new. In the following months, he saw a number of patients with identical skin findings. Professor Agostino Crosti, the chairman of the department of dermatology, was skeptical about his observations and conclusions, and said: "*Gianotti, ti te'l ghe la mania del virus*" ("Gianotti, you have a mania about viral diseases" in the Milanese dialect), so Gianotti published reports of his first cases as a solo author.¹ In the following year, Gianotti identified 8 additional cases. By now, Crosti was convinced of the existence of the disease and the importance of Gianotti's discovery. The 2 published an article titled "*Dermatosi infantile eruttiva acroesposta di probabile origine virosica*" ("Acro located infantile eruptive dermatosis probably of viral origin").² Following the tradition of the times, Crosti's name was listed as first author, but today this entity is universally known as Gianotti-Crosti syndrome.³ Dr Gianotti died at a south Italian shoreline from heart failure on July 25, 1985.

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Figure. Ferdinando Gianotti, MD, 1963



Ferdinando Gianotti with his son, Raffaele Gianotti, who is now a professor of dermatology at the University of Milan, Milan, Italy.

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