

Luigi Mangiagalli

PIERGIORGIO CROSIGNANI⁽¹⁾, CARLO LA VECCHIA⁽²⁾

(1) IRCCS Ca' Granda Foundation Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico, Milan, Italy.

(2) Department of Clinical Sciences and Community Health, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Department of Clinical Sciences and Community Health, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy.
email: carlo.lavecchia@unimi.it

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Luigi Mangiagalli (1850-1928) is a well known figure and a “founding father” of obstetrics and gynecology in Italy, but less recognized are the wide range implications of his work on a public health and social level. In fact, apart from its surgical, clinical and academic values, all the activities of Mangiagalli had a public health, and hence a political relevance. Thus, when at age 27 he was named professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology in Sassari, Sardinia, he not only focused on the improvement of the local obstetrics clinic -when he arrived there were no beds and only a one broken forceps- and the control of puerperal infections, but also to the control of malaria and syphilis in pregnancy.

Later on, when he was professor in Pavia, he not only concentrated on surgery - his over 650 laparotomies had been a unique record and that time - but on teaching not only to medical students, but also to a recently established of a school for midwives. He founded a similar school for midwives in Milan, recognizing their key role in reducing maternal and perinatal mortality. He also established in Pavia one the best obstetrics and gynecology libraries of the time.

The foundation of the University of Milan in 1923, of which he was the first Dean, goes along with his activities devoted to an improvement of teaching institutions, and consequently not only of research, but also towards assuring up-to-date health care available to all the population of Milan.

Less recognized than his role of the creation of the University of Milan, are the establishment in 1909 of the “Asilo Regina Elena”, for the care and assistance of poor mothers, and that on 1925, of the National Cancer Institute in Milan. The recognition, at that time, of the importance of cancer on a clinical and public health level is a clear evidence of Mangiagalli's long term vision of the public health priorities in the future, well outside his main field of obstetrics and gynecology.

A SKETCH BIOGRAPHY OF LUIGI MANGIAGALLI

- According to his biographer, Innocente Clivio [1], he was born in Mortara (near Milano) on July 16, 1850 (while according to Google one year earlier- June 16, 1849).
- Graduated in Medicine in Pavia on July 25, 1873, he started a postdoctoral practice in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Ospedale Maggiore in Milan. The poor conditions of care, even in the largest hospital in Milan, at that time are summarized with his original words in Panel 1 (in Italian). In short, antisepsis was unknown - and Mangiagalli published the first work on it in Italy two years later -, surgery was minimal, including oncological surgery, which was performed with rudimental hot iron instruments after opening the vagina with some wood device and medical treatment was nonexistent apart for some opioids.
- In 1877 he joined the "School of Obstetrics for midwives", also placed in the old monastery of "St. Caterina alla Ruota" ruled at that time by Domenico Chiara. Despite his young age, in a few years Mangiagalli substantially changed the treatments of benign gynecological conditions, as well as those of uterine and ovarian cancers according to the new European and American medical practice.
In fact, gynaecological surgery started to be safer at that time and an experimental study of Mangiagalli on antisepsis applied to surgery was the first contribution in this area published in Italy.
Fluent in German and French, he organized in 1878 an educational visit to the main obstetrics and Gynecology Departments in Austria and Germany with the goal to pick-up the best practice in countries well known for their excellent gynecological care.
A detailed report of this experience is summarized in 5 letters written to his chief Professor Domenico Chiara, which are a clear indication of his open minded and international vision at that time (Panel 2, in Italian).
- Experienced doctor and skilled surgeon, despite being less than 30, in 1882 he was appointed Director of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Sassari, Sardinia. His teaching activity in Sassari, due to the poor condition of that Department, was surely challenging, since the only specific equipments he found were a broken forceps and a damaged model of pelvic bone.
- Five years later he moved to Catania, Sicily, where promoted the construction of a new building for the Department and started a huge surgical activity. At that time, he married the "flower of his life" Rosa Perelli Paradisi, a charming Lady who for 34 years was the real strong support of his multiform professional activity.
- In 1895 his expected promotion to Padova was denied. Consequently, Mangiagalli left academy and became the Chief of his old Obstetrics and Gynecological Department at the Ospedale Maggiore in Milan.
- Already well recognised, in 1895 the University of Pavia appointed him to the direction of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. His surgical skill was documented by more than 600 laparatomies, an incredible number for that time.
- His political career started in 1902, when was elected member of the national parliament (MP) for the radical constitutional party. Three years later, he was named Senator of the Kingdom.
- In 1902 left again the University and accepted the direction of the prestigious "School of Obstetrics for Midwives" in Milan and in 1905 he succeeded in establishing in Milan the first postdoctoral school of

medicine: the "Istituti Clinici di Perfezionamento" , thus again joining Academia. A large new building (Figure 1) was built for the new Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the event was remarkably acknowledged by the 1906 "Simplon International Exposition" (EXPO) held in Milano, which dedicated one of their pavillons to the new hospital [2].

- Elected Major of the city in 1922, he founded in 1923 (October 16) the University of Milan (Università degli Studi di Milano) and a year later, on December 8, the opening of first year of the academic activity was celebrated by Luigi Mangiagalli, Dean of the new University.
- On January 19 (1925) he also established in Milan the Royal Institute for the study and the care of cancer, subsequently National Cancer Institute - Istituto Nazionale Tumori, one of the best recognised and most prestigious medical institutions in Italy now.

A few months later (November 1925) he summarized his key achievements and the most significant experiences of 75 years of life in the last official speech presented under his statue, just donated by the grateful citizens.

Mangiagalli died suddenly on July 3, 1928.

FIGURE 1

THE CLINICA MANGIAGALLI, MILAN IN 1906



PANEL 1

"Il comparto ospitaliero al quale ero addetto come assistente era un comparto di ginecologia medica. L'antisepsi, che nel campo ostetrico vedeva un mio lavoro, il primo in Italia, due anni dopo, vi era affatto sconosciuta, e solo modesti interventi chirurgici mi erano concessi; l'ablazione di polipi e la puntura di cisti ovariche, seguite da iniezioni di iodio nella sacca. Quanto alla cura chirurgica del cancro essa era rappresentata dalla cauterizzazione col ferrum candens. La donna era posta in posizione ostetrica, valve di legno proteggevano la vagina e numerosi ferri di varia foggia col manico di legno erano collocati in un braciere ardente a carbone e, portati a color rosso, servivano poi a cauterizzare ripetutamente il carcinoma, senza previo raschiamento. Di cure mediche in quel tempo non si parlava. La morfina era il rimedio sintomatico principe".

PANEL 2

"osservò diligentemente e minutamente, procurando di portare nei miei giudizi uno spirito calmo, sereno, spassionato, onde tenermi egualmente lontano e dalla esagerata lode delle cose straniere e dalla soverchia severità per le cose nostrane, divulgando all'estero quanto si fa in Italia, e contribuendo a far conoscere agli italiani quanto si pratica quivi, fedele al principio che la scienza non riconosce frontiere".

References

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