Gastone Giovanni Nussdorfer is no longer with us. Gastone completed his medical studies at the University of Padua Medical School, where he graduated magna cum laude in 1967. He then became a fellow at the Department of Anatomy of Padua University, where he was appointed full professor in 1975, one of the youngest professors of medicine in the country. For almost 4 decades, Gastone Nussdorfer has been a world-recognized leader in the field of cytophysiology of the adrenal gland. His outstanding research work has contributed enormously to the current understanding of the role of this gland in the regulation of blood pressure.

It is difficult to describe the scientific contributions of Prof Nussdorfer on 1 page: he published more than 500 papers, almost exclusively in high-impact international journals, and numerous chapters in major international handbooks for some of which he acted as the editor or coeditor. Although he contributed importantly to the cytophysiology and pathophysiology of practically all steroid-producing glands, his “true love” was the adrenal gland. He was a pioneer in the application of quantitative histomorphometric, autoradiographic, and immunohistochemical techniques at both the optical and the electron microscopy level to the investigation of adrenal gland function and the integration of this information with biochemical and molecular biological data.

During his tenure at the Department of Anatomy and Physiology, he assembled a highly productive team of researchers that provided novel knowledge on the influence of numerous peptides on the adrenal cortex. As summarized in an exhaustive review monograph published in 1986 in International Reviews of Cytology, the research carried out by Nussdorfer’s group demonstrate the existence of a local corticotropin releasing factor—corticotropin system within the adrenal gland level and suggested the pathophysiologic role of this system. Prof Nussdorfer thereafter focused his work on the influence of neuropeptides on the structure and function of the adrenal cortex and, in particular, on their role in controlling the growth and secretion of the gland. Among the many noteworthy pioneering observations that Prof Nussdorfer and his collaborators made are those on the role of somatotropin produced locally in the adrenal cortex on the proliferation and steroidogenesis of the gland. He also demonstrated that several other neuropeptides, among which corticotropin releasing factor, oxytocin, the vasoactive intestinal peptide, galanin, pituitary adenylate cyclase–activating polypeptide, pneumadin, pancreatic polypeptide, opioid peptides, and, more recently, leptins and orexins, exert a direct influence on the adrenal cortex. Knowledge about the influence of neuropeptides on the adrenal gland was fundamental for the understanding of the functional relationship between the adrenal cortex and the adrenal medulla. During the last 15 years, in collaboration with our laboratory, Prof Nussdorfer’s work at DMCS focused on the role of the adrenal gland in the regulation of blood pressure. This work has led to the demonstration of endogenous endothelins and their receptors in the human adrenal cortex and aldosterone-producing adenomas and to the identification of functional effects of the endothelins, including the specific growth-promoting effect on the adrenocortical zona glomerulosa and the secretagogue effect on aldosterone mediated by endothelin B receptors. Experimental work in collaboration with H.C. Champions and colleagues at Johns Hopkins Hospital School of Medicine and L.K. Malendowicz at the University of Medical Sciences in Poznan, Poland, has also led to the elucidation of the effects of the adrenomedullin system on the adrenal cortex and blood vessels and the molecular mechanisms by which these peptide systems affect the secretion of aldosterone and the growth and differentiation of the adrenocortical and medullary tissues. This work has also contributed to the development of novel techniques for the isolation and culture of adrenocortical stem cells in vitro.

Gastone Nussdorfer was a member of the editorial boards of many internationally acclaimed scientific periodicals, including Peptides, Biomedical Research, Cytobios, International Journal of Molecular Medicine, Folia Morphologica, and Advances in Clinical and Experimental Medicine.

For his outstanding achievements and lifetime commitment to science and his long-standing and fruitful cooperation with Polish Scientific Institutions, Prof Nussdorfer was awarded...
an Honoris Causa Degree in Medicine of the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poznan in 2002.

His enormous contributions were inversely related to his willingness and availability to be celebrated. Indeed, his reserve, modesty, and cordiality made him beloved not only by all of his more strict coworkers but also by everyone who had the fortune to interact with him.

The University of Padua Medical School, his collaborators, and the scientific community at large are in deep sorrow for his premature loss. To honor his memory the board of the International PhD Program in Arterial Hypertension and Vascular Biology has established “The Gastone G. Nussdorfer Award in Hypertension Lecture” to be delivered yearly in October to a scientist who has made a major achievement in hypertension research.

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Gastone Giovanni Nussdorfer. November 28, 1943, to October 18, 2007
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