

1986-2026: a mature SICP is ready to speak the language of the international scientific community without losing its own identity



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*What do you do and what do you want?
If, mute, I look at you in the mirror,
(26.3 Rig Veda 2500 BC)*

On 11 July 1986, in Milan, the Italian Society for Palliative Care (SICP) was founded by Professor Vittorio Ventafridda, its first President, and 45 pioneers. The time was right to establish a collective body to coordinate and provide scientific guidance for the palliative care cultural and care movement, which originated in Italy in the late 1970s at the Istituto dei Tumori in Milan. At the forthcoming 23rd SICP Congress, to be held in Riccione from 19 to 21 November, we will celebrate this important anniversary of an initiative that immediately gave rise to significant national and international developments. In Italy, the 1st Congress of the newly established SICP was held in Rapallo in 1988, and from the very outset, the Quaderni di Cure Palliative (Palliative Care Notebooks) were published, which gave rise to the current Rivista Italiana di Cure Palliative (Italian Journal of Palliative Care). In 1988, also in Milan, the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) was founded, with its headquarters at the National Institute for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Cancer: Vittorio Ventafridda was unanimously elected the first President of what has become one of the world's most important scientific societies in the field of palliative care. In the same year, with the support of the Floriani Foundation, of which he was the Scientific Director, he organised the 1st EAPC Congress at the University of Milan. Hundreds of professionals – researchers, clinicians, bioethicists, welfare planners, and journalists working in the health, socio-health and social sectors – attended this gathering of the international scientific community, which undoubtedly marked the beginning of the 'modern era' of palliative care. Both in Italy and across Europe, that Congress laid the foundations for disseminating the message of Cicely Saunders and the founding fathers of palliative care, who, in the UK, the USA, Canada and also in Italy, had recognised that *'even when a cure is not possible, we can (and must) care for the patient and their family'*. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Robert Twycross, Mary Baynes, Geoffrey Hanks, Balfour

Mount, Cathy Foley and Derek Doyle, not to mention Franco De Conno, Ventafridda's tireless right-hand man, along with Heidy Blumhuber, are just a few of the names who, half a century ago, championed the development of the *'change of perspective'* in caring for the terminally ill and dying, and for their families, embodied by palliative care. Nothing comes about by chance, and it is important to remind younger generations that the strength of the first national and international initiatives stemmed, above all, from the enthusiasm of belonging to a *'nascent state'* that was disseminating culturally and scientifically innovative messages: a veritable *'Copernican'* revolution in the approach to the terminally ill patient and their family. In Italy, this enthusiasm has characterised the SICP community, which initially comprised dozens of members but soon grew to hundreds, and now numbers around 3,000. Over the past 40 years, this energy has inspired dozens of Coordinators of the SICP's regional branches and their respective regional Boards of Directors, as well as members of the national Boards of Directors and, last but not least, the Presidents. On this 40th anniversary, for the sake of brevity and out of gratitude, we shall mention only the Presidents who have succeeded the first one, with the intention of tracing this important history in greater depth as soon as possible: Oscar Corli, Mauro Marinari, Giorgio Trizzino, Furio Zucco, Giovanni Zaninetta, Adriana Turriziani, Carlo Peruselli, Italo Penco, Gino Gobber and Gianpaolo Fortini, who is currently in office. Since 1999, this movement has benefited from synergies with the second national driving force behind palliative care in Italy: the Palliative Care Federation, which today represents 116 third-sector organisations involved in palliative care. However, it should also be recalled that the founders of the SICP and the EAPC had at their disposal, from the outset, a number of essential communication tools that ensured the widest possible dissemination of the new concept of palliative care. It may now seem obvious,

but the speed with which the message of palliative care spread around the world was also due to the fact that Ventafridda and his international team spoke and published their scientific papers in the language that has since become the main language of the scientific community: English. If the 3-Step Scale for the management of cancer pain had not been developed and disseminated in English by the internationally renowned clinician-scientist Ventafridda, leveraging the platform of the World Health Organization, are we confident that, since 1986, it would have become the cultural cornerstone that has underpinned the management of 'cancer pain' worldwide for decades?

Precisely for this reason, 40 years after the founding of the SICP, we are working to ensure that the Italian Palliative Care network becomes better known internationally by publishing its scientific, clinical and

socio-cultural activities, which are in no way inferior to those of many other countries. This will inevitably involve the gradual introduction of bilingualism in the scientific material published in the *Rivista Italiana di Cure Palliative*, without abandoning our beloved Italian language. Together with the current Board of Directors of a now mature SICP, we are convinced that this is the right path.

This second issue of 2026 represents an initial demonstration of our shared commitment, precisely on the 40th anniversary of the Society's foundation: two articles and two editorials in Italian and English, including one by Philip Larkin, former President of the EAPC, and, for the very first time, a bilingual piece on the EAPC's international activities by one of its current Vice-Presidents, Simone Veronese.

Let us continue in this way, with the help of all of you.