

# Alavi Receives University of Bologna Honorary Degree

On March 23, the Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna, Italy, founded in 1088, bestowed a *laurea honoris causa* (honorary doctorate) in medicine and surgery on Abass Alavi, MD, professor of radiology at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia).

The *laurea honoris causa* is a prestigious academic award recognizing exceptional contributions and given only rarely by Italian universities. Alavi is the first nuclear medicine physician to receive this honorary degree. The ceremony was held in the historic Aula Absidale Santa Lucia, one of the most well known academic sites in Bologna. It included a procession guided by Pier Ugo Calzolari, *magnifico rettore* (the title of the university rector) of the University of Bologna, followed by the deans of the university's faculties and by the academic senators in colorful robes. The ceremony included musical interludes and medieval songs performed by a choir from the university.

In his *laudatio* (introductory remarks), Professor Romeo Canini, chair of radiology at the University of Bologna, said:

Among the researchers who originally investigated PET, the contribution of Abass Alavi was essential. In particular he and his colleagues from Penn introduced the idea of using 18-fluorine-labeled deoxyglucose [FDG] to evaluate regional brain metabolism, and his team proposed and studied the application of FDG and other radiotracers in neurology and other disciplines. At present PET is recognized as one of the most important imaging methods, and PET procedures are performed in the entire world, with increasing numbers. This is surely due to the pioneer work of Abass Alavi, who indeed made possible the development of this modality.

Professor Luigi Mansi, chair of nuclear medicine at the Second University of Naples (Italy), said of Alavi: "Because of his expertise as well as his high human skills and noble qualities, he has been a maestro for hundreds of nuclear physicians and scientists from all over the world. In this sense, as a living example of a great scientist and a great mentor at the same time, he can also be considered a bridge for diffusion of nuclear medicine among different countries."

Professor Stefano Fanti, chair of nuclear medicine at the University of Bologna, added: "Many specialists trained by Abass are at present chairing important centers in all continents. So, Abass Alavi represents the synthesis of the skills that every teacher should reach and express: the skill of scientific logic and the quality of teaching. As such, the



Alavi (left) received the University of Bologna honorary doctorate in medicine and surgery from Calzolari.

University of Bologna recognized those skills with the highest academic acknowledgement."

In addition to professors and students from the university, many nuclear medicine physicians from other Italian universities attended the ceremony, including Professors Alessandro Giordano, Raffaele Giubbini, Giuseppe Madeddu, and Marco Salvatore.

The *laurea honoris causa* ceremony was followed on March 24 and 25 by an international conference on "Molecular and Cellular Imaging: from Experimentation to Clinical Practice," organized by Professors Canini and Fanti and held in the Aula Absidale Santa Lucia. The conference was sponsored by the University of Bologna and by the Società Italiana Radiologia Medica and the Associazione Italiana Medicina Nucleare ed Imaging Molecolare.

Speakers from Europe as well as from the United States shared their visions of the role of functional imaging in the future practice of medicine. Among those present were health economists, radiologists, nuclear physicians, oncologists, basic scientists, and chemists. Presentations focused on the applications of molecular imaging techniques to cardiology and oncology, specifically on the development of new MR and ultrasound techniques, molecular imaging probes, new PET radiopharmaceuticals, immunotherapy for cancer, and the cost effectiveness of molecular imaging in the management of patients. ✧