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July 14, 2009

To whom it may concern

I am writing this letter to express my most enthusiastic support for the Center of Physiopathology of Cell Differentiation of the Vita-Salute San Raffaele University and San Raffaele Institute in Milano. The Center, which comprises outstanding research groups, has produced work of the highest caliber over the last few years and represents a flagship for Italian science.

The Center, created in 2001, has brought together in a synergistic fashion some of the best investigators at San Raffaele, investigators who also happen to be leaders in their field at the international level. The common denominator of these groups is an interest in molecular mechanisms underlying cell function, with the long term goal not only of advancing knowledge, but also, and more importantly, of providing information towards the elucidation of pathogenetic mechanisms of disease and towards therapy and cure.

Collectively, the groups of the Center cover different areas of cell biology (organization of the cell nucleus, dynamics of the endoplasmic reticulum and of protein synthesis, membrane traffic, signal transduction) that are relevant to a wide variety of fields, such as immunology and neuroscience and of disease areas, such as cancer, diabetes and neurodegeneration. The productivity of the Center, after its definition as a “Center of Excellence” has been outstanding, as indicated by the number of publications in top scientific journals and by the quality of such publications. For example, Dr. Bianchi discovered a new signaling pathway implicated in inflammation that involves a completely novel secretion mechanism. Dr. Meldolesi reported the identification and characterization of a new cell compartment implicated in secretion and identified a genetic switch that plays a master role in the expression of the neurosecretion phenotype. Dr. Pardi made important contributions to the field of cell adhesion, with special emphasis on the adhesion on leukocytes, a cell type with a critical role in inflammation. Dr. Casari has been a key contributor to the field of neurodegeneration, with very prominent work on Parkinson and hereditary spastic paraplegia. Drs. De Curtis and Valtorta have carried out outstanding work on membrane traffic and cytoskeleton dynamics in neuronal processes and synapses, a research area of fundamental importance in neuroscience. Drs. Marchisio and Biffo have provided new insight into protein synthesis and its regulation. Dr. Sitia continues to be one

of the international leaders in the field of quality control in protein production in the endoplasmic reticulum.

An overview of the collective work of the Center reveals a trend toward innovation and production of very original science. Each group has important international connections and brings to the Center in a very synergistic way a unique set of expertise, technical know-how and intellectual background. Proximity to the Hospital offers great opportunity of basic science-clinical science correlations. Presence on campus of a top medical school is an opportunity to capitalize on the talent and fresh enthusiasm of outstanding medical students who are interested in research and to further motivate them to pursue a research career.

The Center is also an impressive environment for the training of young scientists. As I witnessed during recent visits to San Raffaele, much emphasis is dedicated (successfully) to this endeavor. Not surprisingly, young members of the Center are welcome to top labs in Europe and in North America for postdoctoral training. Through their presence in these other labs they help cross-fertilization of fields and forge further international relationships of the Center.

In conclusion, I consider the Center of Physiopathology of Cell Differentiation of the Vita-Salute San Raffaele University a success story of Italian science. It is critical and urgent for Italy to support and strengthen a Center of this caliber.

Sincerely



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