

A*STAR scientist conferred top Italian honor

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Singapore: Professor Paola Castagnoli, scientific director at A*STAR's Singapore Immunology Network (SIgN), has been conferred the honor of the "Order of the Star of Italy" (Ufficiale dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia).

This is one of the highest civil honors awarded by the president of the Italian Republic to Italians overseas and foreigners who have made outstanding contributions to the preservation and promotion of Italy's national prestige abroad. For her outstanding contributions towards promoting scientific exchange and research collaborations between Singapore and Italy, Professor Castagnoli is the first Italian scientist in Singapore to be conferred this premier award. She received the award from the Ambassador of Italy to Singapore Dr Anacleto Felicani.

An expert in immunology, Professor Castagnoli has published over 180 scientific publications and has been one of the most highly cited immunologists worldwide. Since assuming her role as Scientific Director and Senior Principal Investigator of SIgN in 2007, Professor Castagnoli has led her research group in discoveries that provided novel insights into the mechanisms of immune diseases. She has also actively engaged and created platforms to forge research collaborations between scientists from Singapore and Italy, in both the public and private sectors.

In 2009, she facilitated the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) inked between A*STAR and top Italian research institutes, namely FIRC Institute of Molecular Oncology Foundation (IFOM), European Institute of Oncology (IEO) and European School of Molecular Medicine (SEMM). This agreement paved the way for several scientific collaborations, the most notable of which

led to the set up of a joint Singapore-Italy laboratory between A*STAR and IFOM to advance basic scientific findings into new strategies of cancer treatment and prevention. Professor Castagnoli also spearheaded the signing of a Memorandum of Intent (MOI) between A*STAR and Regione Lombardia in the same year. This agreement expanded scientific collaborations between scientists from A*STAR and Lombardia, in areas such as Biotechnology, New Materials, Energy-Environment and Health. To foster more in-depth research collaborations between the two countries, Professor Castagnoli organised the Singapore-Italy Joint Symposium on Biomedical Sciences in 2009. The event attracted more than 200 scientists from both countries and the region, and saw top scientists presenting groundbreaking findings in cancer, immunology and stem cell therapies.

A passionate scientist with a personal interest in grooming scientific talent, Professor Castagnoli was instrumental in establishing the research and training attachment agreement between A*STAR and the University of Milano-Bicocca. This strategic tie-up resulted in the exchange of manpower and PhD students.

Professor Castagnoli's scientific contributions extended beyond collaborations with the public research institutions. Under her leadership as Scientific Director at SlgN, A*STAR inked an agreement with Italian biotechnology company Siena Biotech in 2010, to develop new drugs and targeted antibodies to treat cancer and bone diseases such as osteoporosis.

Chairman of A*STAR Mr Lim Chuan Poh said, "I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Paola. Her dedication in pushing the frontiers of immunology research at A*STAR, and her contributions towards strengthening the scientific collaborations between Singapore and Italy are commendable. This award reaffirms the excellent bilateral scientific relations that have been established between Singapore and Italy."

Professor Philippe Kourilsky, chairman of SlgN, said, "I am very glad that Paola's outstanding contributions towards advancing immunology, and her dedication to promoting scientific exchanges between Singapore and Italy has won her this prestigious award from the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano. I believe she will continue to build on her international scientific networks to open up more avenues for both public and private institutions in Singapore and Italy to engage in research partnerships that will benefit society."