The FIGO Committee on Gynecologic Oncology deeply regrets to inform that one of its most distinguished former members, Dr. Robert E. Scully, passed away last October 30th, in Boston, MA, U.S.A, at the age of 91. He was an Emeritus Professor of Pathology at Harvard Medical School.

After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1944, Dr. Scully trained at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and the Boston Children’s Hospital. However, his real alma mater would be the emblematic Massachusetts General Hospital, where he served for 55 years. At "Mass General", under the direction of Drs. Tracy Mallory, Benjamin Castleman, and Joe Vincent Meigs, he started his unique adventure in gynecologic pathology, especially on ovarian tumors. He rapidly became known as a peerless diagnostic pathologist and was soon recognized around the world for his expertise in gynecological pathology.

For over half of a century, Dr. Scully’s scientific contributions brought new light to the field of gynecologic cancer. He described precisely the morphologic features of many hitherto unrecognized tumors, recorded their clinical and operative findings, and outlined their biologic behavior.

Besides publishing almost 500 scientific articles, Dr. Scully was also editor of the Case Records of the Massachusetts General Hospital - published weekly by the New England Journal of Medicine - for a record 27 years (1974-2002). He led the group that produced the first World Health Organization classification of ovarian tumors (1973), authored two editions of the Fascicle on tumors of the ovary of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology of the United States (1979 and 1998), and was an active member of the FIGO Gynecologic Oncology Committee for many years. Thoroughly convinced that fluent communication between the pathologist and the clinician is essential for optimal patient care, he tried hard to improve and standardize tumor terminology in all three organizations. Accordingly, the current classification of gynecologic tumors derives largely from his work. In 2007, Harvard Medical School honored him with the establishment of the Robert E. Scully Professorship in Pathology.

It is not surprising that a pathologist with such exceptional qualities such as Dr. Scully, described for the first time an endless number of neoplastic lesions, had an enormous and paramount scientific production, received thousands of cases (almost 30,000 difficult cases) in consultation from all over the world, or the fact that he was invited to lecture to audiences of the five continents. But what is indeed worthy of notice is the fact
that a man with such intellectual qualities, who was the undisputed reference for pathologists, gynecologists, endocrinologists, oncologists, and many other medical specialists of his time, was also a great human being who preferred not to be noticed; an unassuming person also gifted with a special witty humor and warm social closeness. He leaves a lasting impression even among many relatives of the doctors he worked with, and who will miss him.

Although he did not have any biological children, he left hundreds of students and fellows who loved him as a mentor and friend. Thus, there is no reason for sadness or feeling of loss in the field of gynecologic pathology. In fact, Dr. Scully was honored by the Massachusetts Medical Society with its 2012 “Lifetime Achievement Award” which is given each year to a member of the Society who has made a lasting contribution to the practice of medicine over a lifetime. That says it all.

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On behalf of the FIGO Committee on Gynecologic Oncology