



Obituary

Dimitris Kafetzopoulos 1959 – 2020



It is with great sadness and deep grief we report that following a long and courageous fight with cancer, IMBB Researcher and former Deputy Director of the Institute, Dimitris Kafetzopoulos passed away on March 14, 2020.

Dimitris joined IMBB as a PhD student in 1986, shortly after the foundation of the Institute and FORTH. Except a 3-year post-doctoral work in University of Leiden between 1994-1997, he has been associated with the Institute throughout of his career.

Since the early phases of his career, one of the main focus of his research was on chitin deacetylases and the bioconversion of chitin to chitosan. His results on this topic had important impact on a variety of biotechnology applications. Another field of his interest was cancer genomics. His work has greatly contributed to our current understanding of the role of circulating tumor cells (CTCs) in cancer metastasis and contributed to the development of sensitive diagnostic tools for the identification of CTC subpopulations with high metastatic potential.

Dimitris was fascinated by systems biology approaches, since the early days of the development of high throughput genomics technologies. He founded the Genomics Facility of IMBB in 2000, by setting up microarray-based gene expression profiling services. During the following years, keeping the pace with the fast advancements of high throughput genomics technologies he established state of the art next generation sequencing services at IMBB. Utilizing his experience and the power of new sequencing technologies, in 2016 he built a new laboratory for the analyses

of ancient DNA. The Ancient DNA lab at IMBB has since become the reference facility in Greece for safe storage and analyses of ancient biological material. It supports research on the cultural heritage of the country by fostering interdisciplinary collaborations between archeologists, historians and molecular biologists.

His continuous interest in cancer genomics extended beyond the focused research projects pursued in his laboratory. Dimitris was one of the pioneers and the driving force behind the creation of the Greek Precision Medicine initiative. He has founded and led the Cretan node of the National Precision Medicine Network in Oncology, which will provide state of the art genomics-based diagnostic assays and services for physicians treating cancer patients.

He was also a leading figure in the establishment of the Greek Agro-Bio-Food research networks, which has set several challenging goals, including genome sequencing and analyses of plant species with high economic impact for the country.

Dimitris' scientific activities are marked by the feature of interdisciplinarity. He was highly successful of bringing together scientists from different fields and setting up fruitful collaborations. He has coordinated a large number of national and European research programs, most of which relied on interdisciplinary collaborations. He was also deeply committed to training young students and post-docs. His rich mentoring record greatly contributed to the successes of the Institute's training programs.

Based on the above, inexhaustive account of his accomplishments and contributions, IMBB pays tribute to his memory and offers condolences to Dimitris' family and friends.

His passing away is a great loss for IMBB and the Greek scientific community.