Antonio Vitale, full professor of physics at the University of Bologna, passed away on 8 October 2008 after a painful struggle with an incurable illness.

Antonio was born in Pesaro in 1943 and graduated in physics in 1967. His scientific work developed mainly at CERN, where he started immediately after his diploma to participate in experiments using negative muons to study weak and electromagnetic interactions at the 600 MeV Synchrocyclotron under the leadership of Emilio Zavattini. As head of a Bologna–INFN group he went on to play an important role in the OBELIX collaboration at the Low Energy Antiproton Ring, and most recently he was a member of the ATLAS experiment.

Antonio also fostered experimental work in other laboratories. His initiative was particularly essential with colleagues from Bologna in the Saclay–CERN–Bologna precision determination (to $10^{-5}$ accuracy) of the muon lifetime, from which the value of the Fermi constant is obtained. Together with the measurement made simultaneously at TRIUMF, this achievement remains unsurpassed. At DESY he initiated and actively drove Bologna's participation in the HERA-B experiment. His range of scientific interests also led him to perform research at the INFN national laboratories at Legnaro and Gran Sasso, at the EURATOM research centre at Ispra and at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory in the UK; he also collaborated with colleagues at JINR and Los Alamos.

Colleagues and students were fascinated by his curiosity, eagerness and enthusiasm for research. He was extremely faithful to experiment – placing results before any theoretical prediction or belief – and was particularly keen on data analysis and phenomenology. He had a special intuition for improvements and possible upgrades of experiments and had a great tenacity during data analysis to leave no stone unturned. Once embarked on a project, he would pursue it passionately, with no fear of updating programmes and schedules as required. This attitude was essential when, soon after the discovery of the $W^\pm$ and $Z^0$ particles at CERN, he proposed to the president of the Italian Physical Society, Renato Ricci, the 1984 Bologna Conference on Fifty Years of Weak Interaction Physics; this took place a few months later and remains exceptional in...
that the volume of printed contributions was available on the opening day.

A tenured full professor at Bologna since 1984, Antonio was co-author of a valuable collection of textbooks for university students and was also passionate about more general scientific dissemination. His latest achievement in this respect was the Giuseppe “Beppo” Occhialini Foundation, which he established in Beppo’s birthplace, Fossombrone, under the auspices of INFN and Bologna University, with the primary aim of educating high-school students in the relevance of scientific culture. Most significant are the accurately written books published by the foundation, which are freely distributed with national daily newspapers to familiarize readers with research in nuclear and particle physics. He was working until the end on the latest of these, La fabbrica delle particelle (The particle factory). Co-authored with Vincenzo Vagnoni, it was released on the day of the LHC inauguration and Antonio just had chance to see the first printed copy.

Antonio was endowed with an outstanding potential for communication and human sympathy, which enriched his personality and made his acquaintance special. His exuberant behaviour, matched with brilliant intelligence, and his generous nature were familiar to all who worked with him, or just talked to him over coffee at CERN. His deeply democratic attitude made him interact in the same way with anyone he met, from summer student to CERN director-general or state minister. His presence will be missed by colleagues and students in personal life as well as in research work.

Alfredo Placci, Geneva.