

In Memoriam

Ruth Gail Abramson, M.D.



Ruth Gail Abramson, M.D., died on June 4, 2004 at the age of 70 as a result of ovarian cancer. She worked actively until about six weeks before her death.

Ruth arrived at Mount Sinai in 1963 and in 1987 became full professor in the division of Nephrology. She received her undergraduate education at the University of Pennsylvania and her medical degree at Downstate SUNY, where she was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha.

At MSSM she received various research awards, including the Hirschl Research Career Development Award. Her basic research into mechanisms of uric acid transport was supported by RO1 grants from the National Institutes of Health. The Alumni Association awarded her its highest honor, the Jacobi Medal. She also received the Faculty Council Award for Academic Excellence, and in 2003, she was named Distinguished Professor, a rare honor.

In informing the Mount Sinai community of her passing, Dean, President and CEO, Kenneth L. Davis, M.D., said, "There are few people who have displayed greater passion in caring for and protecting patients or more dedication to Mount Sinai. Her integrity, determination, intelligence and compassion will be sorely missed. Every day she challenged our entire community to live up to our highest values of caring, communicating, teaching and seeking new knowledge. She embodied our loftiest ideals and represented the best of Mount Sinai."

A memorial service was held at MSSM on June 17, 2004. The speakers included Kenneth Davis; Dean Emeritus Nathan Kase; Medicine Chair Paul Klotman; CMO and EVP Deborah Marin; Nephrology Chief Barbara Murphy; Associate Dean for Research Jeff Silverstein; her former graduate student Dr. Joshua Rappoport; and Professors Terry Krulwich, Vesna Najfeld, and Sandra Masur. Her closest surviving relatives, her cousins Herb Abramson and Joseph Schnitzler, also spoke. (See: <http://www.mssm.edu/wfg/CelebrateRuth.shtml>)

Ruth's scientific research was highly regarded—she is one of the few whose submissions to first rank peer-reviewed journals were accepted without revisions. As a clinician, she was also acknowledged as remarkable. Although she started her career when it was difficult for women in academic medicine, she overcame the barriers without outward signs of bitterness. She was a regular at the "doctors' breakfast table" in the cafeteria—usually the only woman there.

She actively taught and mentored our students, fellows, and faculty members. To woman scientists locally and nationally, she was a role model through her presidency of the Women in Nephrology, her research and her service on NIH study sections.

Colleagues who worked closely with her on the most sensitive issues commented that she was always compassionate to individuals, but strict in her adherence to her professional obligations. Dr. Davis noted that she was "the ultimate citizen of the medical center, she contributed greatly as a member and chair of numerous institutional committees. But her wise and effective leadership as chair of the Institutional Review Board was in a category of its own. She set standards of ethical conduct and effective administrative oversight that have been essential to the successful conduct of human subjects research at Mount Sinai.... She was uncompromising in her standards and never stopped inspiring her colleagues to strive for the same excellence. As an institution we owe her much."

Ruth's achievements enhanced the Mount Sinai Hospital and Medical School community, and the larger scientific community and society. Most important, she leaves a legacy of courage, integrity and caring that serves as a model for us all.

Sandra K. Masur, PhD
Professor of Ophthalmology
Associate Dean for Faculty Development
President, Women Faculty Group MSSM