

Extraordinary Reviewer Inspires Annual Reviewer Award

By Don Lockett



Marcy Speer

There are many stars in the universe of NIH peer review. Over 31,000 scientists from across the country and globe cast revealing light on the 80,000 grant applications NIH receives every year. Untold sacrifices are made by these researchers so we can find the best applications and ultimately treat/cure and prevent disease.

One bright star recently moved many at NIH by her heroic commitment: Dr. Marcy Speer continued to review grants during treatment for breast cancer, and she extended her term as a regular member of CSR's [Genetics of Health and Disease Study Section](#) to make up for meetings she missed during chemotherapy. She even served as a temporary reviewer for the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). Amazingly, she even agreed to be nominated to serve a full four-year term on NIEHS' Environmental Health Sciences Review Committee.

When her cancer returned and treatments suddenly proved no match for the disease, Marcy worried about the applications she had to turn back right before an NHGRI review meeting. Two weeks later, she died on August 4 at the Duke Hospital after a two-year battle with breast cancer.

“Marcy’s unwavering passion and commitment to science and NIH peer review was astounding,” says Toni Scarpa, CSR’s Director. “She has been an inspiration to us all.” He continued by explaining, “We were so moved, we established an annual award in her name to honor scientists who excel in their service to science and humanity as a CSR reviewer.”

Members of Marcy’s family have been invited to accept the first Marcy Speer Outstanding CSR Reviewer Award at the next meeting of the Genetics of Health and Disease Study Section. Marcy is survived by her husband of 24 years, Kevin P. Speer, M.D.; her daughters, Kira Carlson Speer and Casey Carlson Speer; her mother, Marsha Carlson; and brothers, Ned, Eric and Kris Carlson.

The Marcy Speer Outstanding CSR Reviewer Award



During the last 10 years, Marcy participated in over 50 study section meetings for NIH: over 30 meetings for CSR and over 20 for other NIH Institutes. Cheryl Corsaro, the Scientific Review Officer for the Genetics of Health and Disease Study Section, said that all those who worked with Marcy will remember her for her “bubbly spirit, love of life, and enthusiasm for science.”

Marcy had been the Director of the Center for Human Genetics and Chief of the Division of Medical Genetics at Duke University Medical Center. Her research focused on uncovering the genetic and environmental contributions to a variety of neurodevelopmental conditions, such as spina bifida, anencephaly and Chiari malformations. In addition, she conducted extensive studies of muscular dystrophy.

She received a Ph.D. in zoology from Duke in 1993, an M.S. in human genetics from Sarah Lawrence College in 1983, and a B.A. in mathematics from Indiana University at Bloomington in 1981.

“It was a life so well lived for others,” said Dr. Scarpa. “She epitomized all that is good about those who serve on NIH review groups.”