

Pioneer in Infectious Disease Research Leaves World-Wide Legacy

Caroline “Caren” Breese Hall, M.D., an internationally recognized expert in pediatric infectious diseases, died at home on December 10, 2012, at age 73. A professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC), Dr. Hall’s contributions and her devotion to science, clinical care, and teaching helped improve the lives of children, trainees, and colleagues. Dr. Hall was known throughout the world for her work studying viral diseases in children. Her research focused on virology, especially respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), human herpes viruses 6 and 7, and vaccines, which resulted in more than 500 published articles.

Dr. Hall was a founding member of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, served as its 5th President, and was the Society’s Historian. She was Chairman of the AAP Committee on Infectious Diseases (Red Book Committee), and the 2006 edition of the Red Book was dedicated to her. Dr. Hall was a member of the CDC Advisory Committee of Immunization Practices, of the Board of Scientific Counselors for the National Center of Infectious Diseases, and of numerous committees for the National Academies of Science and the American Board of Pediatrics. She was elected to the Institute of Medicine and the Royal College of Physicians. Her numerous honors included the American Academy of Pediatrics Award for Lifetime Contribution to Infectious Disease Education, the Distinguished Physician and Distinguished Service Awards from the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, the Infectious Disease Society of America’s John Franklin Enders Lectureship, the Pan American Society of Virology’s Award, and the Robert M. Chanock Lifetime Achievement Award.

“Dr. Hall was highly respected in the Department of Pediatrics and at Golisano Children’s Hospital for her outstanding scholarship, her brilliant teaching of all levels of trainees and faculty, and for her kind, gentle, and humanitarian nature,” said Elizabeth R. McAnarney, M.D., former pediatrician-in-chief and chair emerita of Pediatrics, who has worked with Dr. Hall since the mid-1970s. “Her numerous national and local awards signify the breadth and depth of worldwide respect by her colleagues, especially her election to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences in 2002.”

“Her seminal studies of RSV and later HHV6 were truly groundbreaking. She set the bar for clinical and translational research of pediatric infectious diseases, and will evermore serve as an inspiration to pediatricians across the globe,” said Janet A. Englund, president of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, and David W. Kimberlin, president-elect of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, in a statement.

Dr. Hall loved children and was a practicing infectious disease physician with a sharp focus on finding best practices for infection prevention and the proper role of antiviral therapy for treating RSV. She also was the mastermind behind myriad community surveillance studies. Her ability to network with and win the respect of community pediatricians laid the necessary infrastructure for what is now known as the New Vaccine Surveillance Network, a group that tracks the prevalence of disease community-wide, and the efficacy of related vaccines in combating them.

“She was really one of the masterful people when it came to doing clinical research. She would use our offices, and she was always very conscientious and would come out and share the results of the studies with us,” said Anne Francis, M.D., partner at Elmwood Pediatric Group (a practice Dr. Hall’s father co-founded) and clinical professor of Pediatrics at URMC. Frances also recalled Dr. Hall’s incredible speaking skills and the fun habit she had of ending Grand Rounds with a poem about her topic.

When Dr. Hall received the Robert M. Chanock Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2008, Ann Falsey, M.D., professor of Infectious Disease at URMC and infectious disease specialist at Rochester General Health System, wrote a poem in her honor, “Ode to the Maven of RSV.”

Edward Walsh, M.D., professor of Infectious Disease at URM and head of the Infectious Disease Unit at Rochester General Health System, worked closely with Dr. Hall between 1980 and 1993. From the moment he moved into her lab during his fellowship, he was impressed with her efficiency and productivity.

“I always figured she just never slept,” Walsh said. Recalling how he felt as a junior faculty member watching her work, Walsh said he thought, “I can’t keep up with this lady. I didn’t know how she could get it all done.”

Dr. Hall support helped set Walsh down his future path of research, including putting her name on his first NIH grant submission. “There’s not a chance in the world I would have gotten that grant without Caren.”

As a professor, Hall was known for her wonderful teaching ability and willingness to reach out to learners at every level. She won URM’s Pediatric Housestaff teaching award over 10 times, most recently in 2010. Recalling his years as her student, John Treanor, M.D., professor of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology and Immunology, said, “She had a sharp eye for discerning what sort of research was clinically significant and would have real pay-off in terms of advancing kids’ health.”

Dr. Hall was a true pioneer in the realm of roseola (human herpes virus 6) research, part of amending the current understanding of how the disease infects, Treanor said. “She even helped uncover its bizarre ability to actually insert itself into human genetic code and be passed from parent to child.

A native of Brighton, Dr. Hall earned a bachelor’s degree in chemistry from Wellesley College and her medical degree at the University Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry. Her residency at Yale University was followed by fellowships in pediatric infectious diseases and in medicine in allergy and immunology, both at Yale.

Dr. Hall is survived by her husband William J. Hall, M.D., Paul H. Fine Professor of Medicine at URM, son Burr W. (Sandy) Hall, associate professor in Cardiology at URM, two daughters, Kellian (Mark) Dowd, and Amity (Marc) Grabisch, and six grandchildren.