

Obituary: Carol Briggs (1958 – 2015)



Carol Briggs (1958 - 2015)

Sadly after a brief illness, Carol died in London on 25th February 2015, at the relatively young age of 56 years.

After studying at Portsmouth Polytechnic, she started her career as a biomedical scientist at St Mary's Hospital as a research technician and then undertook standard haematology laboratory training at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in central London.

I first met her at a UK Haematology Laboratory meeting in Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands, in the early 1990's. We discussed how general basic skills in worldwide laboratory practice were declining and the lack of training facilities for scientists wishing to continue to investigate novel instrumentation and in-house assay development. After returning from this meeting we established, at University College London Hospital (UCLH) in conjunction with University College London (UCL), a laboratory haematology evaluation centre, with initial support from several instrument manufacturers, and were able to offer Carol a position as a full time research fellow to establish such a unit. Support was also obtained from the Department of Health, Medical Devices Agency to approve newly released

haematology instrumentation, independent of commercial company bias, using a pre-determined reporting format.

Carol started working in the evaluation unit in 1997 and continued in this role for the next 17 years until her untimely death earlier this year. During this time she published more than 50 publications in prime review journals, along with numerous guideline documents, review papers and book chapters on various subjects in laboratory haematology. Her most important work was in the development of the immature platelet fraction (IPF) or reticulated platelet parameter on the XE and then XN Sysmex analysers, and the initial development work on the XN analyser series between 2008-2011.

As well as her ground breaking laboratory work, she was invited and then served on several national and international haematology standardisation committees and evidence based guideline groups. These included the general haematology working party of the British Committee for Standards in Haematology (BCSH), membership of the United Kingdom National External Quality Assessment Service (UKNEQAS) advisory group and internationally as Scientific Secretary of the International Committee of Standardisation in Haematology (ICSH) and recently as a Board Member of the International Society of Laboratory Haematology (ISLH). She has proudly served as an Associate Editor for the International Journal of Laboratory Hematology (IJLH) for the past few years and frequently helped numerous authors to correct and rewrite their papers in a form acceptable for publication. One of her proudest achievements was to be invited to write and edit a chapter on blood cell counters for the last two editions of the oldest standard haematology text, "Dacie and Lewis Practical Haematology".

Despite all these achievements she resisted several invitations to work for large global haematology instrument manufacturers in senior positions, but was committed to continue expertly supervising and training young scientists and clinicians in laboratory practice.

Carol will be sadly missed from the world of laboratory haematology internationally and leaves many friends and her husband, Roger, who will all miss her incisive wit, charm and inventiveness in laboratory automation. Already firm offers have been received to recognise her skills and foresight, with an annual international award from the Sysmex Corporation and possibly associated standardisation bodies. Her presence as a thoughtful mind and innovator in her chosen subject is now unfortunately a great premature loss to the scientific, haematological world as a whole.

Samuel J. Machin