

Dr Trudy (Helmtrud) Roach (17.9.1944 – 28.4.2010)



It is with great sadness that we note the death of Dr Trudy (Helmtrud) Roach PhD, on Wednesday April 28th at her home in West Wellow, after a long battle with cancer.

Trudy worked at the University of Southampton for over 20 years in the area of cartilage biology holding the position of Reader in the Bone and Joint Research Group. Trudy was interested in all aspects of bone and cartilage development and basic cell biology of skeletal cells - this was not work to Trudy but her passion. In particular, over the last decade, Trudy was involved in trying to understand the disease process in osteoarthritis.

Trudy brought a different perspective to research with a unique ability to literally see what others could not; from her early observations on trans-differentiation of chondrocytes, insights on endochondral ossification and, more recently, changes in chondrocyte phenotype in osteoarthritis. Much of her work was initially conducted using organ culture models and careful application of microscopy techniques from photomicroscopy, immunocytochemistry through to scanning electron microscopy. Trudy went on to demonstrate the role of asymmetric cell division and apoptosis in the process of chondrocyte transdifferentiation and in 1996 suggested a possible epigenetic component in the process, an area of research Trudy would lead on a decade later. Trudy was adventurous and determined in all aspects, willing to try new approaches and over the last ten years her efforts centred on the use of molecular techniques to investigate the mechanisms involved in osteoarthritis - convinced that epigenetics had a role.

Trudy changed the way many people thought about the importance of epigenetics in bone, in particular DNA methylation as a means of activating/silencing genes in osteoarthritis. She was the first to report on epigenetic influences on the risk of osteoarthritis – a seminal observation published in 2006 and finally recognised by the field in recent years. Trudy was also an active member of the Bone Research Society and British Orthopaedic Research Society for whom she was Treasurer for many years.

Trudy however was more than just an extraordinary scientist; she was a powerful supporter for patients' groups and arthritis charities and spoke regularly to lay members on cartilage biology and osteoarthritis and the research being undertaken. Over a period of 15 years, Trudy organised a series of biennial Hip and Knee walks at Exbury Gardens that raised over £250K for charities such as Arthritis Research Campaign and Wessex Medical Research.

On a personal level, Trudy gave generously of her time, always available to chat science and provide support and to troubleshoot a new technique or offer new suggestions to students and colleagues. In the realm of histology, microscopy and bone epigenetics, her experience and expertise were unmatched and advice freely given. Totally approachable, Trudy made time for all and her enthusiasm, dedication and fun of science resulted in numerous collaborations from Russia to Japan and America. Many overseas students knew first hand the warmth of Trudy's nature as almost all stayed at her home on arrival to the UK or during the holiday season. Her dedication and enthusiasm for science made her a highly regarded researcher and teacher and an integral and much loved member of the Bone and Joint Research Group and of the many scientists she mentored. Trudy worked up until the final weeks and was still advising students and working on a treatise on epigenetics in chronic disease to be published in Autumn 2010; again this was "her hobby".

Trudy will be greatly missed by her many friends and colleagues throughout the world. Our thoughts and condolences are with her husband Cecil, her children, Tania and Yvonne and her grandchildren Nina and Maya.

The funeral will take place at St Margaret's Church, East Wellow, Romsey, Hampshire on Tuesday May 11th at 2.00pm.

The family has requested no flowers please, but donations may be made using the donations facilities on: www.wellow-nightingale.org