In Memoriam

Sonia I. Skarlatos (1953–2013)

Investigators of the Cardiovascular Cell Therapy Research Network

Sonia Isabella Skarlatos, PhD, FAHA, was Program Officer of the Cardiovascular Cell Therapy Clinical Research Network (CCTRN). Dr Skarlatos worked at National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) for almost 30 years, rising to the position of deputy director of the Division of Cardiovascular Sciences at NHLBI. Until her death, she oversaw planning, development, and implementation of national and international innovative research activities for vascular diseases; gene and cell therapies for heart, lung, and blood diseases; and translational research. In that capacity, she directed 5 major NHLBI programs.

It is impossible for us as CCTRN investigators to keep reverence from our writing and thoughts when reflecting on Sonia’s integral role in our own work. She was the perfect project officer for CCTRN. She saw her role on behalf of the Network as one of procuring the administrative and, when available, the financial support for the investigators to conduct their research. She let the scientists design, execute, and analyze the science. This she did responsibly, even humbly—a paragon of the principle of servant leadership.

Network interactions with Sonia were both purposeful and collegial. She had the rare ability to apply a mix of tact, firmness, prestige, respect, and authority in delicate combinations. Whatever tension was present in the room was reduced by her presence, and her arrival at a Steering Committee meeting was the beginning of the solution to what problems plagued us at the moment. To Sonia, issues that had the aura of intractability were nothing more than bridges to build stronger relationships within the Network. We emerged with a solution and were stronger for it. Sonia took no credit.

If we accept that no one dies before their work is done, then we must believe that Sonia has revealed to us all that she was meant to show. She was a wonderful friend and a superior teacher; now the lessons have been taught and learned. So, while we look to the future with concern, we are also assured that we have learned all that we could from the master, recognizing that it is now time for us to move on. We also step forward with the understanding that we as colleagues of each other and mentors of junior scientists must work the good in them that Sonia did in us, ensuring that all of the benefits of her good nature do not wither but blossom.

Someone said that those who are dear to the Gods die prematurely. If They treasure her nearly as much as we did, then we are gratified that They waited as long as They did.
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