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Remembering Rose Mary

Oncology nursing and the *Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF)* lost a leader on February 21, 2011, with the passing of Rose Mary Carroll-Johnson, MN, RN. Rose Mary sat at the helm of *ONF* for 20 years. The imprint of her leadership is indelible. For many nurses, *ONF* has become the source for oncology nursing research, the foundation for evidence-based clinical practice.

I don't remember a time as an oncology nurse without Rose Mary—as editor, author, mentor, friend. I came to oncology nursing as a second career and, as I was entering nursing school in 1991, Rose Mary was already launching a new endeavor in her own life, as editor of *ONF*. My introduction to being an author, reviewer, and editor came from Rose Mary. Her recognition of abilities I didn't know I possessed gave me confidence to accept her challenges. Her quiet support inspired me.

Do you use nursing diagnoses in your documentation or research? If so, Rose Mary touched your professional life by helping develop and refine the standardized North American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA) diagnoses. She served as editor of the official NANDA journal, *Nursing Diagnosis*, from 1989–1994. When you open your electronic medical record (EMR) to document care on your patient, you see terminology that is common to most EMRs and institutions. You can thank Rose Mary's expertise for giving you those understandable and standardized terms that make sense to nurses. She was editor of the *International Journal of Nursing Terminologies and Classifications* from 2000–2006. If your interests are focused on hospice or palliative care, you may belong to the Hospice and Palliative Care Nurses Association (HPNA). Rose Mary left her mark on HPNA, too. She served as editor of the *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing* from 1998–2000.

Are you sensing a trend here? Rose Mary—whether she was the nurse working shift with you, mentor, researcher, editor of a journal that affected your professional practice, or friend—was there, at your side. When the news came



that Rose Mary had lost her two-year battle with cancer, e-mails and phone calls flooded in. Condolences. Memories. Expressions of loss. I realized that Rose Mary's reach was far wider than I could singularly report. And so, this editorial shares thoughts, remembrances, and anecdotes about Rose Mary. The themes emerged from the messages received.

Oncology Nursing Society

Rose Mary was a founding member of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) and went on to contribute time and expertise to the Society over the years. Paula Rieger, RN, MSN, CAE, FAAN, ONS chief executive officer, and Carlton Brown, RN, PhD, AOCN®, ONS president, shared these thoughts on behalf of ONS leadership, staff, and volunteers: "We should all be inspired by Rose Mary Carroll-Johnson's life and the selfless work she did on behalf of our Society and the *Forum*. Both her personal accomplishments and the impact of the journal she led as editor have left an indelible effect on the care of patients and families with cancer and the nurses who care for them. It is difficult to fully capture the impact, yet it is almost certain there are countless examples everywhere."

In 2010, ONS renamed an award in her honor, the Rose Mary Carroll-Johnson

ONS Distinguished Award for Consistent Contribution to Nursing Literature, given to recognize individuals who have made consistent and significant contributions to the oncology nursing literature. The 2010 award went to Rita Wickham, PhD, RN, AOCN®, CHPN, who shared these thoughts: "I had known Rose Mary since my earliest days on the editorial board of the *Forum* almost 20 years ago. She was such a great leader and made it so enjoyable to figure out the future direction of the journal and how we would accomplish it. One of my highest compliments is to define someone as a 'good egg'—and that definitely was Rose Mary. She was one of the best eggs! She was a clear thinker, a solid supporter of other oncology nurses' professional growth, a great colleague, and a cheerful and upbeat friend." Susan Behrend, RN, MSN, AOCN®, recalls serving with Rose Mary on the first ONS Steering Council in 1996: "I remember Rosie at all of the meetings. She was so pensive, quiet, reserved, a magnanimous listener . . . and then at the most opportune moment, Rosie would strike with pearls of wisdom. She would humble us all, bringing us back full circle, directing us to stay focused, and enabling us to maintain our course and establish clarity at a time when professional and personal relationships were rapidly changing."

Editor and Author

Linda Sarna, DNSc, RN, FAAN, AOCN®, reminded us, "Rose Mary has over 80 publications listed on PubMed which include her insightful editorials as editor of *ONF*. She championed the role of the oncology advanced practice nurse and excellence in patient care, and her contributions changed the landscape of oncology nursing in this country and worldwide." From Deborah K. Mayer, PhD, RN, AOCN®, FAAN: "I have known Rose Mary for the 20 years she was editor of the *Forum*, through many ONS activities, and with my own publications in her journal. I worked more closely with her when I assumed editorship of the *Clinical*



The 1998–1999 ONS Steering Council

Standing, from left: Kevin Sowers, Bridget Culhane, Mel Haberman, Lynne Suhayda, Wende Levy, Len Mafrika, and Marie Bagay. Sitting, from left: Susan Ezzone, Susan Behrend, Linda Worrall, Rose Mary Carroll-Johnson, and Betty Ferrell

Journal of Oncology Nursing. She was a generous mentor to me on the art and skill of being an editor. She was always thoughtful and looked at the different sides of issues before weighing in with her wise comments. She was an effective steward of our flagship publication and touched and mentored many authors over the years." *Lisa Schulmeister, RN, MN, APRN-BC, OCN®, FAAN*, reflected, "Rose Mary was a stellar editor who wrote a staggering number of editorials over the past two decades. They were all 'spot on' and captured whatever was going on in the oncology nursing world at the time. Her voice, and her insight, will live on in her work."

Many of the current and former associate editors recalled the annual editorial board meetings and choosing the cover color theme for the following year, among them was *Rita Wickham*: "One of my fondest memories was Rose Mary (dramatically) presenting the cover color swatches—one of the highlights of that annual meeting—so we could choose the color for the next year's *ONF* cover. I know it sounds pretty simple, but it was so much fun! Rose Mary was always consistent and true." *Connie Engelking, MS, RN, OCN®,* reflected on Rose Mary's contributions as an editor and friend: "I first met Rose Mary more than 20 years ago when I was invited to join the *Forum* Editorial Board. Rose Mary made it a wonderful experience—a lot of hard work but equally as much hilarity, especially when it came to choosing the *ONF* cover color. Rose Mary was a great colleague, mentor, and friend. She was such a special person—sweet, wise, funny, compassionate, kind. She generously shared her

wisdom and was always ready with a listening ear. She will never be gone from my life or from the lives of thousands of others—those who knew her and those who benefitted from the writings she shepherded to publication." *Lois Loescher, PhD, RN,* recalls, "I first worked with Rose Mary in the mid-1990s as the first assistant editor of *ONF*. I was truly honored to work with her and fortunate to learn about the publishing business and technical writing from a true master of the craft. When I last saw Rose Mary a year ago, I was not surprised that she continued to live with determination, grace, and calm despite the obvious hardships of her cancer. She wisely reminded me to do the things you love, be kind to all and, of course, to 'do the write thing.'" So many of Rose Mary's colleagues saw her role as editor of the *Forum* in much the same way as *Rebecca Crane-Okada, PhD, RN, CNS, AOCN®*: "In looking over the titles of her many editorials, I am struck by the gentle and yet direct way in which she tackled some difficult issues. Through her many editorials, she spoke for many who looked to her as *their* voices."

Mentor

Pamela Hallquist Viale, RN, MS, CS, ANP, AOCNP®, remembers Rose Mary for her mentorship: "Rose Mary was a mentor and editor of excellence, always excited about nurse writers and supportive of new authors. She genuinely enjoyed seeing authors grow and develop and her enthusiasm for writers in our profession was palpable." *Linda Sarna, DNSc, RN, FAAN, AOCN®,* recalled how Rose Mary "led the way in mentoring

many authors and oncology nursing researchers and facilitated the publication of evidence-based findings to support clinical practice. She led countless workshops where she mentored new authors; few nurses could match her rich track record in academic publishing."

Deborah Boyle, RN, MSN, AOCN®, FAAN, related an opportunity from Rosie that altered the direction of her professional career. "My first contact with Rose Mary was nearly three decades ago when she contacted me about reviewing a chemotherapy textbook for nurses. 'What a huge job,' I immediately thought. While I was ready to decline the offer based on workload, there was something about her gentle style, her offer to assist and assume responsibility for the major portion of the editing that made me change my mind. That was the beginning of many years of camaraderie and friendship. We shared the love of writing and Rosie's face always reflected that when she spoke of her job. Her one fault was her humbleness. Several days before she died, I wrote her a letter that was read to her by one of our dear friends. In that letter, I reflected on her astounding legacy. 'Just think of all the people you mentored in writing over the years and even more, the people who have been influenced by the writings you have cultivated. Not many of us can claim to have touched the lives of thousands of nurses,' I said, 'yet you have.' Testimony to Rosie's too short but influential life lives on in those of us who were lucky enough to call her patient cheerleader, exquisite mentor, and cherished friend." *Lois Loescher* recalls, "Rose Mary was the perfect mentor. She had high expectations and would offer encouragement and kudos along with constructive criticism, always with infinite patience and understated humor. Rosie's rules of writing—write in active voice; parsimony is preferable; avoid anthropomorphisms; never, ever, utilize anything, just use it; and dozens more—I continue to use in my own work and have passed on to hundreds of students."

Nurse

From a Navy family, Rose Mary began her nursing career as a Navy nurse and kept her hand in clinical nursing, progressing through the ranks from staff nurse to supervisor to research nurse. Rose Mary received her master's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in 1982 and was one of the pioneers in the specialty of oncology nursing. In 2010, Rose Mary received the

UCLA School of Nursing Distinguished Alumni Award. A reflection from *Elizabeth Johnson Mills*, Rose Mary's daughter: "Two years ago, in the last [ONF] editorial my mother wrote before her diagnosis, she reflected on the importance of one person—a nurse. She wrote, 'What would our world be like if we took away all the nurses? Take them all out of the equation and consider how those gaps would ever be filled' (Carroll-Johnson, 2009, p. 259). In that same editorial, my mother proceeded to list the many tasks nurses perform on a daily basis and demonstrate just how important nurses are to the medical community. She made her family proud taking care of others as a nurse, serving her country in the Navy, and caring for her family members throughout the various stages of their lives."

Rebecca Crane-Okada reflected, "Rose Mary came 'on loan' to me as a research nurse until I had funds to pay her. We soon became true colleagues and friends. Our relationship was one of calm collaboration, of trust and confidence, and of great respect. She was such a humble person, who demurred attention sent her way, yet received it joyfully. She believed in people's ability to express themselves. She nurtured that. Rose Mary has left an enduring legacy. She has shown us through scholarship in writing, expressing our expert practice, education, and research, we demonstrate not only to ourselves and each other, but to the world at large, what oncology nursing is all about, and how patients and families need our nursing care. She charged us with remembering not to forget what we do and who we are."

Friend

Rose Mary to many, Rosie to her close friends and family. Many people told me



At the 2004 ONS Congress

they had been friends with Rose Mary for decades. How do you put decades of memories into a brief paragraph? *Mary Hoban, RN, MN*, reflects, "Rose Mary was a really true, good person. The reality of who she was is important: always loving but sometimes impatient, gentle, and tough at the same time. She was an incredibly good friend, faithful, supportive. She loved her family—they were the center of her world. One of the best things about being Rose Mary's friend was that she loved you as you were with no need for pretense. She always made gentle suggestions for change without criticizing what you were thinking. During the rough times in Rose Mary's life—times of adversity—she put one foot in front of the other and didn't complain. We were friends for 40 years, supporting each other through our various life experiences."

Nancy Jo Bush, RN, MN, MA, AOCN®, shares her long friendship, "Any tribute to my dear friend, Rosie, deserves to be nothing less than eloquent. Yet her death has left me without words to describe what a rare gift her life was to the many who loved her. Rosie was a dear and treasured friend for 30 years of my life. She was loyal and dedicated to those whom she loved and I was blessed to be one of those people. Her life enriched mine in immeasurable ways and her presence was a genuine comfort for me along all paths of my life. Rosie knew how very much I loved her and those who knew of our friendship know this as well. It is difficult to share what is most intimate to the heart. I will miss her—my friend, my confidant, my mentor, my colleague. I held onto her heartstrings and now it is hard to let go. We will all miss her professionally, but I will miss her most as my beloved friend."

Esther Muscari Desimini, RN, MSN, APRN, BC, AOCN®, remembers, "I met Rose Mary professionally 18 years ago when, like so many others, she saw 'promise in me' and invited me to review for the journal. As the years progressed and she sent projects and recognition my way, she became a friend. It was through introduction to Nancy Jo Bush that she became 'Rosie.' My memories are of the three of us and the many excursions we shared, and Rosie's laugh—recognizable only by her shaking shoulders and a big 'light up her face' smile. I was fortunate that my girls, young back then, fell under the span of Rosie's expansive nurturing wings. My girls grew up describing the three of us as the face of cancer care, with my oldest not realizing until she was 18 that there were doctors in oncology. How

fortunate I am that my children learned to experience the beauty, strength, and love of 'girlfriends.'" From *Rose Mary* herself, posted about a year ago on the *CaringBridge.org* Web site: "Clearly no one else in this world has a better, more supportive, group of friends than me! You are all wonderful and your messages of hope and support have upheld me through many trying times. I have felt all the hugs and well wishes, spoken or unspoken."

Family

Rose Mary was always "family first." She never missed an opportunity to share her family's proud moments and keep us up to date. Rose Mary's daughter, *Elizabeth Johnson Mills*, and son, *David Johnson*, shared the following: "Her most important and treasured role was mother. She devoted her life to David and me. My mother raised us with the gentle grace that she is known for. She cared for us despite the challenges we posed, she worked tirelessly to provide us the life she knew we deserved, and she protected us from all evils that could present harm. We always knew that we had her support and unending love."

My thanks go to all who contributed to this editorial by sharing memories. Because I could not say it better, I close this editorial with comments *Elizabeth Johnson Mills* shared at the memorial service in Valencia, CA, on March 4, 2011: "So how is it, I've asked myself, that we fill the gap in our lives left by this profound loss? The answer I have come up with is, we don't. Rather, I believe that every act of compassion my mother performed, every nurse she inspired, every friend she comforted, every prayer she offered, and every good-night kiss she gave are being sewn together, creating a bridge from our hearts and minds to her place in heaven. This bridge is vast and strong, as her good deeds are numerous. We all know that her loss can never be filled, but we can find comfort knowing that we travel together on this bridge of memories."

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Reference

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