

Honoring the Life of Diane Fairclough, PhD, MPH/MSPH

By Susanne Fairclough

Whenever she heard a siren passing by, Diane would say, “May you be safe.” Her life was about caring for others, whether a four-footed friend, or through her work investigating and improving quality of life through her cancer research alongside other colleagues.

Early on in high school, having met an inspiring doctor at Yale in New Haven, CT, she wanted to be a part of the medical profession. After a degree in chemistry from Bucknell University in 1973, she applied to medical school, but she was not one of the few women who were chosen in those years. Later that loss came to seem fortunate to her in redirecting her career toward research, while motivating her single-pointed focus to break through the glass ceiling for women in her profession.

While obtaining her master’s degree from Virginia Polytechnic University, she was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. Going through the treatment gave her deep appreciation for other cancer patients and began a career path where she was intimately concerned with cancer research, quality of life studies, and doing the detective work that captured her intelligence. She received a second master’s and doctorate degrees from University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in biostatistics. Later diagnoses of melanoma, breast cancer, and brain tumors went on to inform her work with compassion and great strength.

She worked at St Jude’s Hospital in Memphis, Dana Farber in Boston, and in 1996 came to Denver to join the faculty member in the Cancer Center at the University of Colorado and later joined the Colorado School of Public Health. She was appointed professor in 2002.

During her time, her research interests were in the design and application of statistical methods in clinical research with particular interest in the patient-reported outcomes of disease and its treatment. In addition, she had a longstanding interest in statistical methodology for the design and analysis of longitudinal studies with random and non-random missing data.

Diane was a very well-recognized researcher, having published more than 250 papers in the statistical and clinical literature. She was recognized by the International Society for Quality of Life Research as an *Outstanding Reviewer* in 2007 and 2008 and received the President’s Award for her work on behalf of the Society in 2012.

In addition to her research projects, mentoring younger colleagues, was an important part of her calling. She has served as a mentor to numerous trainees and junior colleagues in the Department of Biostatistics and Informatics, through her work in the Cancer Center and more recently, CU ACCORDS.

Travel was a passion for her and as add-ons to the annual ISOQOL meetings she would find places to visit and hike. There were few parts of the globe that she hadn't explored—New Zealand, Australia, Africa, Russia, and throughout Europe, and more recently she hiked the Amalfi coast and in Patagonia with colleagues.

She made Denver her home for 28 years, with her four-footed hiking companion, her beloved dog Sam. After Sam died, Diane began fostering dogs and preparing them for adoption. In the summertime, her big backyard was opened for gatherings of friends and colleagues—from work, the local YMCA, the block party of her street, the local garden club, the Swallow Hill Denver Uke Community, and the Denver Uke Jammers, an outreach ukulele group she founded inspired by one such group in Kauai. She visited Kauai yearly, deeply imbibing the spirit of Aloha, which she carried with her.

Diane passed away March 2, 2024, just two weeks after returning from Kauai, where she played ukulele, always ready to rise to hula, even when her health declined, with the local ukulele groups. Also, desiring to help with conservation efforts, she volunteered at the National Tropical Botanical gardens for the last several years. When she returned home, she took in two more dogs to foster. She gave of her loving and wise spirit to the very end.

In honor of her remarkable life, Diane's loved ones, ColoradoSPH colleagues, and others have established a memorial fund in her name. The proceeds will be used to support young researchers and host ongoing lectureships in her honor. For more information, please contact Travis Leiker, assistant dean of external relations, at travis.leiker@cuanschutz.edu or call 303.817.5744.

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