

# HEAD OF UTHealth's CONSORTIUM ON AGING, TRAIL- BLAZER FOR GERIATRIC HEALTH DIES REMEMBERING DR. CARMEL BITONDO DYER

I met Dr Dyer in Oct. 2008 when she came to speak at the UTHRO Health Fair and for the majority of our membership it was love at first sight –they connected almost immediately to her vision and goal, her enthusiasm and easy to understand medical concepts and treatments. It became the spark for The Excellence Fund started in late 2010 and our first foray into fundraising; the results of the first year were really encouraging. The Executive Committee donated to the Excellent Fund in memory of Dr. Tom Matney, who was a driving force behind the Excellence Fund and our slogan “seniors helping seniors.” In 2016 the members voted to create a permanent Endowment for Healthy Aging with the goal of raising \$25,000 over 5 years, but after that time we actually raised more than \$80,000 and climbing. She was a dynamo and will be greatly missed for her compassion, and championing the cause of the elderly in care and abuse.

*Henny van Dijk*



I first met Dr. Dyer (having been her student for so long, I never could bring myself to call her by her first name!) in a newspaper article written about a doctor who specialized in seeing older patients. 21 years ago, she graciously agreed to let me shadow her so I could begin learning more about the interesting field of geriatric medicine.



*Credit The Houston Chronicle/Leonardo Carrizo*

She showed me not only some of my first clinical experiences but more importantly taught me not to see a patient as a series of diagnoses but to consider the person as a whole. One of the first assignments she gave me was to write the life story and timeline of one of her patients. To this day, I cannot remember anything about the patient's medical conditions, but I distinctly remember her love for playing the piano.

Dr. Dyer was the ultimate mentor. She did not just dole out advice during meetings, she actively provided opportunities for her mentees by opening doors to collaborators, projects, and speaking engagements. When I was looking for my faculty position, she “saved a spot for me” at UTHealth. Whenever I was frustrated with something, she would remind me that “It’s a marathon, not a sprint”.

She was deeply spiritual and very family oriented. The first thing she would always ask me is how my family (including my parents) were doing. She even knit a baby hat when my daughter was born! Her family and faith were most important to her, even as she was founding institutes and consortiums and carrying on towards her ultimate vision of establishing a hospital for comprehensive geriatric care.

I have now come full circle with her, though sooner than I would have liked and not in the way I had hoped. My final tribute to her was published in a recent newspaper article, but her legacy will live on forever.

*Jessica Lee*

I first met Carmel back in 2005 when she recruited me to join her at Baylor. I'll never forget how she welcomed me on as faculty and had me jump right in. The very first thing she did was give me a copy of her CV. I was so impressed by all that she had accomplished, and she made it clear that she hoped to mentor me to be that successful as well. Others in our division have shared similar stories of her inspiring us. She was always able to convince us that we were capable of anything, and she enabled us to reach further than we ever thought possible. What I will miss most about working with Carmel is her passion for the care of older people and their care team. She could get so excited and animated, and could articulate such a drive that she had to improve her patients' lives. Just spending a few minutes with her, you would leave fired up and ready to take on any barriers in the way. Working with her was such a potent experience, and it's impossible to articulate the void that her passing has left.

*Holly Holmes*

I met you in the late 1990s when you were working as a physician at Baylor College of Medicine and I was employed with Adult Protective Services (APS). At the time very little research had been done on elder mistreatment and there were very few collaborations between the medical community and public agencies serving vulnerable older adults. Your enthusiasm, will and determination to make a difference in the lives of older adult in this community and across the country made for a perfect partnership with APS. At the time, there were few if any geriatric specialists interested in visiting abused and neglected older adults in their homes which in many cases were in disrepair and not adequately fit for humans to reside.

Over the years you would be called upon over and over again to help older adults suffering from severe abuse and neglect and on each occasion you gladly and passionately assisted APS workers and the vulnerable adults they were attempting to help. You would eventually move to UTHealth and expand your work in the field of geriatrics. Soon you became a champion in the Houston community and across the country advocating for specialized care for vulnerable and mistreated older adults. You established the Texas Elder Abuse Mistreatment Institute to improve the lives of abused, neglected and exploited older adults through clinical care, research and education. Your work to establish an elder fatality review team to examine suspicious deaths is still making a difference in Texas. Development of the Houston Financial Abuse Specialist Team was instrumental in helping to change the way our state laws protect older adults from being financially exploited. Your work to establish the Senior Justice Assessment Center in Harris County will have a lasting effect on the way law enforcement and the district attorney's office charges perpetrators and prosecutes cases of elder mistreatment.

All of these things are outstanding accomplishments, but your greatest asset is the caring, compassionate manner in which you communicate with and treat patients and their families. Over the years we became friends and professional colleagues and as the APS director in Houston, I would call on you to assist the agency and vulnerable older we served many times. I remember calling you after being contacted by Texas legislators about a frail woman in her nineties living with a son of questionable capacity who was unable to provide adequate care. This was a high-profile case about a woman of substantial means being severely neglected. You agreed to accompany me to her home to provide aid. I will always remember the manner that you interacted with both the older dignified woman and her son. I remember thinking how great it would be if every doctor exhibited the type of professional bedside manner and caring demeanor you displayed on that visit. Speaking with both the patient and son you expressed concern and empathized with their situation. The care and tenderness you showed is something that I believe every young doctor should have an opportunity to witness. I am sure that because of your willingness to help, APS was able to get the family the care they needed and extend the life of the woman.

This is just one of many examples over the past 20 plus years of helping older adults in this community. There were many more examples and older residents of Houston and their families are grateful and blessed that you have championed better geriatric care in our city. More importantly, I value our more than 20 years of friendship. During this period, we've discussed issues of aging community and what we could do to improve conditions for older adults. Dinners and lunches with Nancy, Candace, Jason, Fran and Jim. Discussions of mutual family and friends, presentations at conferences and even finalizing details of contracts over lunch. Thank you, Dr. Dyer, for being your authentic self and a friend.

James G. Booker



While driving home one day on I-10 and 610 about where IKEA is I noticed this huge billboard some 100 ft of the ground and featuring a well known face—Dr. Carmel Dyer and I knew then and so did Fran that she had become an icon in the UTHealth and Houston community. The tributes to her on this “extra” make clear how much she will be missed by her colleagues, friends, and patients. Our deepest condolences to her family.

Henny van Dijk



Dr. Dyer and I were acquainted through my representation of UTHRO on the Executive Committee of the Consortium on Aging. During that time, I came to admire her personally and professionally. I have a great deal of respect for her dedication to the Consortium on Aging and the giant steps the Consortium has taken under her leadership to improve the health and well-being of senior citizens. Her compassion for the environmental and health issues facing seniors was inspiring. Dr. Dyer's very vocal and consistent support of UTHRO will continue to be a substantial benefit to our organization in achieving our motto of "Seniors Helping Seniors". With Highest Regards

*Barbara Kelly*

Knowing Dr Dyer was an honor. She was a dear friend, a mentor, an advocate for the aging population which we both had in common. I have had the privilege of working with Dr Dyer in many different situations. I first met her when she did an internship in geriatrics and she was assigned to the dementia unit where I was the social worker. That was some 25 or so years ago. We bonded at that time and frequently worked together both in medical and social issues regarding Alzheimer's Disease and the many related disorders. She from a medical point and I from a social work point of view. We often evaluated and went over issues to benefit patients and assist families in dementia education for their loved ones and at times themselves who were diagnosed at an early stage. I did role play, offered support and validation and she provided the medical knowledge of the disease process. Dr. Dyer was family oriented, listened and guided families through the difficult times as loved ones deteriorated. She was a great teacher and it is a great loss that we will all have to learn to accept. One of our last conversations was about corona virus and how difficult it has become for patients and families that their loved one has become isolated. She stated that my continued interaction with them was meaningful especially those families caring for a loved with dementia. I promised her I would. Our conversations at the end were limited at which time I texted and or sent written notes. I received answers in "hearts and smiles" Rest In Peace Dr Dyer. U r sooo missed and will be forever remembered.

*Fran Floersheimer*

I first met Dr. Carmel Dyer when UTHRO established the Endowment for Healthy aging in conjunction with the Consortium on Aging and she was appointed as the administrator of that fund. She was so very supportive of UTHRO and its endeavors and always touted the efforts of the organization. No matter how busy she was or how many hats she wore, she was always responsive to any questions or suggestions I had, answering emails or phone calls within 24 hours. Her enthusiasm and ideas for bettering the lives of the older population were unmatched. She spoke many times of her dream for having a central, all-encompassing facility for geriatric medical care, and I hope that can come to fruition. Dr. Dyer will be greatly missed by UTHRO, the entire UTHHealth community and all who knew her.

*Peggy O'Neill*

I was reading the paper and saw that Carmel Dyer has just died on May 4. She always was full of energy and gave so much to UT Health Geriatric. She was a great pioneer for the Elderly in many aspects. It saddened me and it is a great loss to UTHHealth and all of us.

*Inga Leon, UTHRO member*



*Rest in Peace Carmel*