

Mary MacKinnon: A pioneer in diabetes care who never rested on her laurels

by Gwen Hall

“Mary leaves a trail of pioneering work for the rest of us to follow. Let us remember that and continue to strive to live up to her memory.”

It is with deepest regret that I write to inform readers of the death of Mary MacKinnon.

I first came across Mary when presented with a copy of *Providing Diabetes Care in General Practice*. I thought it a wonderful book and was in the midst of penning a letter to the publisher to say how excellent and practical it was when the phone rang. It was Mary. She wanted me to do something for her. I agreed without knowing what it was on the principle that someone who wrote that book would not ask for anything trivial. She asked me to join a subgroup of the St Vincent Task Force. Many of you will remember her tireless role in co-chairing that.

Little did I know that Mary’s talents would ensure I “volunteered” for many things diabetes related in the following years. She had the knack of making you want to participate and to encourage others to do the same. Her work began in general practice and diabetes specialist nursing. She was way ahead of her time and always saw the person with diabetes as the key member of the team. Mary’s vision and leadership played an important role in the emergence of diabetes specialist nursing, and her commitment to nurse education and patient empowerment is recognised as an exemplary model of best practice within the profession.

She became diabetes co-ordinator for Sheffield and, later, a lecturer at the University of Sheffield, where she designed and delivered diabetes programmes. She was a former Honorary Secretary of the British Diabetic Association (BDA) Education Section and was a member of the Department of Health/BDA St Vincent Task Force. I was proud, through Mary, to be involved, in 1997, with the birth of Diabetes UK’s Primary Care Diabetes Professional Section (PCD UK).

Mary was a founder and the first Director of Education of Warwick Diabetes Care and Senior Lecturer at the University of Warwick. And yes, you’re right. She got me involved with that too.

Mary worked with the World Health Organization and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) and was a former IDF Vice-President and IDF Diabetes Education Consultative Section committee member.

Mary diagnosed her own diabetes in 1999 but still didn’t rest on her laurels – she became a steering group member for the DESMOND (Diabetes Education and Self Management for Ongoing and Newly Diagnosed) initiative and chair of PROUD (Professionals United by Diabetes). She was an elected lay member and Vice-chair of the Diabetes UK Advisory Council (England). She gave the 1999 inaugural Mary MacKinnon lecture at the Diabetes UK annual conference – this distinguished lecture is awarded annually and many colleagues who have been honoured to present it considered her a good friend. I know I did.

Each of us will remember her in our own way. I feel hugely privileged to have known and worked with Mary... to have been able to call her my friend. She leaves a trail of pioneering work for the rest of us to follow. Let us remember that and continue to strive to live up to her memory. ■



Mary MacKinnon RGN, MMed Sci

Gwen Hall is a Diabetes Specialist Nurse in the Primary Care Team, Portsmouth Community Diabetes Service, Portsmouth.