

In Memory of Dr. Leslie Bernstein



It is with great sadness that we share with you that a founding member of the California Teachers Study, Leslie Bernstein, has passed away at the age of 82.

Dr. Bernstein leaves behind a legacy in the California Teachers Study, which she helped create and then managed for many years. She will also be fondly remembered for the care with which she mentored young researchers and for her dedication to breast cancer advocacy.

This newsletter is dedicated to her.



In the mid-1990s, Dr. Bernstein was one of the 11 key California researchers who worked to establish a long-term study that could help researchers understand the causes of breast cancer and other diseases that primarily affect women. That study would come to be known as our beloved California Teachers Study.

The California Teachers Study team has changed over the years, as is to be expected on a multi-decade study, but most of today's team had the opportunity to work directly with Dr. Bernstein.

"Leslie Bernstein was an inspiration to many...within the CTS team, in her work in cancer and women's health research, and then to the researchers she mentored and took under her wing over the years. She made such impact to many people and will be missed," said Chris Duffy, Senior Program Manager at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF).

Ms. Duffy joined the CTS team in 1999, and her memories highlight the way Dr. Bernstein interacted with new California Teachers Study colleagues. "I first met Leslie at one of the CTS Steering Committee (SC) meetings. It was a bit intimidating working with such distinguished researchers. However, Leslie was always warm and genuinely engaged with the newer members who joined the SC—she made efforts to get to know everyone at a more personal level. She wanted to know you as a colleague and learn about your career goals, but we also had many conversations about the trials and tribulations of raising children, being a working mom, and balancing home life and a career. She shared and often gave great advice on how to maintain that balance. I always appreciated sitting and talking with Leslie—I will miss our chats immensely."

Dr. Bernstein held distinguished roles throughout her research career, first at the University of Southern California (USC) and then at City of Hope, which she joined in 2007. She was and will continue to be known as a pioneer in breast cancer research, especially for her early research findings that established a link between physical activity and breast cancer risk.

"When I joined the Teachers Study, it was clear from my first week on the job that Dr. Bernstein was a titan, both in our department and within the research community as a whole," said Kristen Savage, Study Administrator at City of Hope. "You might think that someone with her credentials wouldn't have time for a young team member, and yet she very clearly delighted in lending her time and expertise to me. Dr. Bernstein spent hours sitting with me in her office, providing feedback on my ideas, and sharing her experiences as a woman in the sciences. At first it surprised me that she would share so much of her time; I very quickly realized that was just Dr. Bernstein's way—she'd always make time for you and for the California Teachers Study. "

Among her many awards and honors are the University of Southern California Presidential Medallion (2000), the Rosalind E. Franklin Award from the National Cancer Institute (2010), and the First Mentor of the Year Award from City of Hope (2015). In 2020, Dr. Bernstein was awarded the Medal of Honor by the American Cancer Society.

"We first met in the summer of 2002, when she delivered the Annual Advances in Cancer Prevention lecture at the NCI. I was a junior investigator then, and over the next few years her name always came up when promotions were discussed. Her recommendations were highly sought after because she had such a strong reputation for mentoring," said Jim Lacey, Director of the Division of Health Analytics at City of Hope and the California Teachers Study Multiple PI. "Fast forward a few years, and she had moved to City of Hope and was recruiting faculty to join her. I jumped at that chance and learned a ton from her. Later on in 2016, she passed the baton of leading the California Teachers Study to me. In 2018, Dr. Elena Martinez joined as a co-leader, and now Dr. Martinez and I are trying to lead and inspire as Dr. Bernstein did. Across all of her studies & many collaborations, she really left a huge legacy."

The California Teachers Study's remembrance post in honor of Dr. Bernstein is [available on our website](#). You can read City of Hope's remembrance post about Dr. Bernstein by clicking [here](#).

We extend our deepest condolences to Dr. Bernstein's family, and to the many participants and researchers who were touched by her life and career.

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