

In Memoriam

Susan E. Bennett, PT, DPT, EdD, NCS, MSCS (1955-2020)

It is impossible to fully capture the extraordinary life of Susan E. Bennett in a few paragraphs. For over 40 years, Sue dedicated her life to serving her patients, students, and the rehabilitation profession. After graduating with her physical therapy degree in 1977, Sue had an immediate fondness for treating patients with neurologic dysfunction and often spoke of the experience that sparked her interest in multiple sclerosis (MS). During a roundtable meeting, a person with MS challenged her by stating that physical therapists had “no idea how to treat” people with the disease. Sue took this message to heart and initiated one of the very first studies examining how exercise affects MS symptoms and quality of life. She always said “and guess what... they got better!” With the evidence to support her, Sue developed an MS wellness program in 1994 that still runs today!

As her expertise in MS developed, Sue’s national presence in the field of neurologic rehabilitation increased as well. She was an accomplished professor and scholar who published impactful original research in major scientific journals. Sue was actively sought out as a highly regarded speaker both nationally and internationally. Her interest in MS eventually led her to take on multiple leadership positions within the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC). In 2004, Sue, along with other contributors, started the “Rehabilitation Research Interest Group,” which then blossomed into the International Organization of MS Rehabilitation Therapists (IOMSRT). By 2008 she was elected to the executive committee as Treasurer and assisted in the creation of the MS Rehabilitation Therapy Specialty Training in 2009. In 2010 she



received the CMSC’s Labe Scheinberg Award for research most likely to impact care in MS. Sue went on to eventually be appointed to the position of President of the CMSC in 2012. In 2016 the CMSC awarded her with the Lifetime Achievement Award, which recognizes an individual whose decades-long commitment has driven significant advances in the care of people with MS. She was the first rehabilitation professional to have received this award.

Her accolades are too vast to mention them all, and she would be the first one to gloss over them. Personally, Sue was dedicated to helping those in her community. For many years she celebrated Thanksgiving by making meals and delivering them to her homebound patients. In 2015, she founded a not-for-profit organization (The WNY Center for Neurologic Wellness) to support wellness services for individuals with neurologic conditions. She even spent time mentoring foster children. Sue loved to travel and socialize with friends, and she was an avid bike rider. She also had an incredibly caring heart for all animals, especially golden retrievers.

From her first experience with physical therapy until her last weeks of life, Sue was dedicated to improving her patients’ lives, even while battling her own physical symptoms. Sue has touched the lives of and imparted her values of service, dedication, and empathy to many thousands of patients, students, friends, and health care providers. She was so much to so many people and will be profoundly missed.

—Lacey Bromley, PT, DPT, NCS, MSCS

Editor’s note: See also the In Memoriam on the CMSC’s website at <https://www.ms-care.org/news/511092/>