

GUEST EDITORS' PAGE



In Memoriam

Jaqueline A. Noonan

Bruce D. Gelb, MD,^a Jane W. Newburger, MD, MPH,^b Amy E. Roberts, MD,^b
Roberta G. Williams, MD^c



Jaqueline A. Noonan, MD, passed away on July 23, 2020, at age 91 years. Over those years, she led a fulfilling life in the care for children. She was born on October 28, 1928, in Burlington, Vermont, but moved to Hartford, Connecticut, at age 9 months. At age 5 years, she decided to become a doctor and had chosen the field of pediatrics at age 7 years. She spent her youth in Connecticut, graduating from Albertus Magnus College, New Haven, with a degree in chemistry. She returned to Vermont to attend medical school, where she graduated in 1954 and went to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, for a rotating internship, her first time visiting the South. Following internship, she completed a residency in pediatrics at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. (It was the practice of the day to become a "free agent" after internship year.) During her residency in Cincinnati, she saw many children from Appalachia who had "come over the hill" from Kentucky. She became committed to the people of Appalachia for their warmth and humanity and to the care of children with long-standing and unmet needs. It was there that she became interested in congenital heart defects during her pathology rotation and decided to pursue a career in pediatric cardiology.

Jackie joined the pediatric cardiology fellowship program at Boston Children's Hospital under Dr. Alexander Nadas in 1956. During her fellowship, she published, with Dr. Nadas, "The hypoplastic left heart syndrome; an analysis of 101 cases" in *Pediatric*

Clinics of North America in 1958 (1). In her words, there was great demand for pediatric cardiologists as she finished her fellowship and accepted a position as the first pediatric cardiologist at the University of Iowa in 1959. While in Iowa, she noted a similarity between patients with pulmonary valve stenosis: short stature, webbed neck, low-set ears, and wide-spaced eyes. She presented her findings in a regional pediatrics meeting in 1963 and published them in 1968 (2). In 1971, the renowned geneticist Dr. John Opitz decided that the condition should be called Noonan syndrome, as it has been deemed ever since. Jackie went on to study the disorder, the most common nonchromosomal genetic trait causing congenital heart disease, throughout her career, publishing her final paper on the topic in 2015 at the age of 86 years (3).

After 2.5 years in Iowa, Jackie met with Dr. John Githens, who had just accepted the position of the first Chair of Pediatrics at the University of Kentucky. Although she was happy in Iowa, her department chairman was leaving, so Dr. Githens was able to convince her to come with him to Kentucky to build a pediatric cardiology program "from scratch." Following her earlier passion for the underserved children in Appalachia, she joined the University of Kentucky in 1961. She served the children of Kentucky for the next 53 years, first as Chief of Pediatric Cardiology and then as Chair of Pediatrics from 1974 to 1992. She was one of the first women to serve as pediatric departmental chair in the United States. Jackie retired at age 85 in 2014.

COLLECTIVE IMPRESSIONS OF COLLEAGUES

Jackie Noonan is best remembered for her passion for helping individuals with Noonan syndrome and their families in coping with its myriad issues. Aside from her own practice in Kentucky, she regularly attended

From ^aThe Mindich Child Health and Development Institute, Departments of Pediatrics and Genetics & Genomic Sciences, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, New York; ^bDepartment of Cardiology, Boston Children's Hospital, and Department of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts; and the ^cDepartment of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.

family-run Noonan syndrome meetings, held every summer. Bruce Gelb recalled meeting Jackie for the first time at the 2002 meeting in Towson, Maryland. "I had never seen a physician as rock star before—every moment of the day, wherever she went, children with 'her' syndrome and their parents would crowd around her, eager just to be in her presence but also to receive her insights into their challenges." Similarly, Amy Roberts, a geneticist who started attending those meetings in 2005 as a genetics trainee, recalled: "The parents hung on Jackie's every word. Her deep interest in each child and her remarkable memory for the details of many of them she saw every few years left a big impression. Although she was a pediatric cardiologist by training, she was at heart a pediatrician. She was as interested in each child's growth or learning as she was in their cardiac history." At those meetings, Jackie was infinitely patient, always sensible with her advice, and still eager to learn more from the families. When the physicians gathered in the evening after the day of clinic, at which each had met with 20 or so families, to review interesting cases, Jackie's wisdom was manifest. At the final meeting that Jackie attended in Florida in 2014, the families and physicians joined to tribute for her more than 50-year sustained devotion to the well-being of individuals with Noonan syndrome.

Professionally, Jackie was a trailblazer beyond just her seminal genetic trait discovery. Although cardiovascular genetics is now well accepted as an area of focus within cardiology, that was most definitely not the case as Jackie embarked on her career. It is unclear if her discovery of Noonan syndrome kindled that interest or if some passion for genetics allowed her to see what other pediatric cardiologists were overlooking. In any case, she did much in her career to draw attention to the importance of disorders beyond Down and Turner syndromes that were related to congenital heart disease, teaching us much about the need to think about our patients holistically, not just their heart defects. That lesson has become increasingly important as we seek to improve outcomes among survivors of congenital heart disease.

Jackie was notably active in the pediatric academic community. Jane Newburger recalled meeting Jackie for the first time at the Cardiology Section of the American Academy of Pediatrics

meeting, at which Jane was delivering her first-ever presentation: "Jackie was warm and encouraging to me and the other young cardiology fellows. She was deeply engaged in the abstract presentations, rising to the microphone often to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Indeed, she attended that meeting faithfully every year, always sitting in the front row." Similarly, Roberta Williams remembered "the sight of Jackie Noonan and Jerry Liebman, buddies since training, sitting together at every American College of Cardiology meeting, getting up to make astute comments, showing the inextinguishable curiosity for emerging knowledge, challenging us to do the same. It was the essence of what brings joy to our field: curiosity, novelty, dynamic interaction, friendships." Jackie achieved this notoriety at a time when women were few and far between in pediatric cardiology (e.g., in the class picture from her fellowship at Boston Children's hospital, she was the only woman). As Jane Newburger observed, "Jackie will always be an exemplar in strength, integrity, and leadership for women in our field."

Finally, Jackie was known for her style and her passions. Jane Newburger recalled, "At social events where we gathered, Jackie's enthusiasm and *joie de vivre* buoyed the spirits of all those around her—she loved life." Amy Roberts, who accompanied Jackie to a Noonan syndrome family meeting in the Netherlands, recalled, "I learned of Jackie's deep pride in being an aunt, her varied interests outside of medicine, her love of basketball, and her fierce self-reliance and independence. Although she was nearly 80 years old at the time, we were not permitted to help carry her bags, and she was often the one walking the most briskly down the sidewalk. As dedicated as she was to her professional career, she was also a well-rounded person who loved her family and friends, her church, her garden, and Kentucky basketball. Big things come in small packages; that was Jackie." Roberta Williams summed up the essence of Jackie: "Hers was a joyous life of accomplishment, friendship, and deep meaning."

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Dr. Roberta G. Williams, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, 4650 Sunset Boulevard, MS 34, Los Angeles, California 90027. E-mail: RWilliams@chla.usc.edu.

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