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In memoriam

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In memoriam: Marion Hendriks-de Jong

Eric P. Krenning¹ · Gabriel P. Krestin¹ · Monique R. Bernsen¹ · Simone U. Dalm¹ · Otto C. Boerman² · Philip H. Elsinga³ · Andor W. J. M. Glaudemans⁴ · Daniëlle J. Vugts⁴ · Jolanta Kunikowska⁵ · Paola A. Erba⁵ · Laura Evangelista⁵ · Berthold A. Nock⁶ · Theodosia Maina⁶ 

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This article is part of the Topical Collection on Editorial.

✉ Theodosia Maina
maina_thea@hotmail.com

¹ Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

² Radboud UMC, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

³ UMCG, Groningen, The Netherlands

⁴ NVNG, Utrecht, & NKRV, Groningen, The Netherlands

⁵ EANM, Vienna, Austria

⁶ Molecular Radiopharmacy, INRASTES, NCSR
“Demokritos”, Patr. Gregoriou E & 27 Neapoleos Str,
15341 Athens, Greece

Late on Sunday evening of May 16, we received the sad message that Marion Hendriks-de Jong, a dear friend and respected colleague, is no longer with us. Marion lost the battle against cancer, a battle she fought with great courage, decency and grace. Marion never complained, but remained grateful and appreciative of life, was full of energy and had new plans to the very end, making those close to her forget about her disease.

The early days at Erasmus MC Following her studies in biology, biochemistry and endocrinology at Wageningen University (cum laude), Marion moved to Rotterdam in 1985 to work on her PhD Thesis in endocrinology (“Thyroid Hormone Transport Into Liver Cells: Its (Patho)Physiological Significance”, 1993, Promotores Prof. Dr. G. Hennemann and Prof. Dr. E.P. Krenning). In 1989, she joined the team of Prof. Dr. Eric P. Krenning at the Department of Nuclear Medicine of the Erasmus MC working in the field of tumor imaging and therapy. She soon established a completely new preclinical facility at this department, with a strong focus on the many clinical questions raised within the project of new radiolabeled peptides for imaging and therapy. This collaboration had a worldwide impact on cancer diagnosis and therapy, “theranostics”, especially in the field of neuroendocrine tumors (NETs). Their pioneering research resulted in the recent approvals of the first peptide receptor radionuclide therapy (PRRT) agent Lutathera® ([¹⁷⁷Lu]Lu-DOTA-TATE) by FDA and EMA and the combination of lysine and arginine (Lysakare®) by EMA for kidney protection during PRRT with a somatostatin analog.

Professor at Erasmus MC In 2007, Marion became a full Professor in Nuclear Biology at the Department of Nuclear Medicine at Erasmus MC. In 2013, Marion joined the newly formed Department of Radiology & Nuclear Medicine at Erasmus MC as a Professor of Preclinical Nuclear Medicine and led the Translational Molecular Imaging and Therapy research group. During this period, Marion was a driving force in bringing new peptides for PRS (peptide receptor scintigraphy) and PRRT to the clinic. Her clear vision of the vast potential of combining expertise from different disciplines and her undisputable talent to bring people together inspired both her peers and the younger generation. She naturally created a remarkable network and forged numerous strong collaborations in academia and industry. Marion tirelessly worked toward the development of multimodality imaging tools and adjuvant therapies for cancer treatment, as well as for exploiting new radionuclides for medical purposes.

National and international cooperations Marion developed many intensive, long-lasting and robust collaborations in the Netherlands and internationally. She cooperated with many teams at the Erasmus MC as well as with Prof. Otto

Boerman in Nijmegen, Prof. Philip Elsinga in Groningen and many others, resulting in a multitude of influential papers in several areas of peptide theranostics. A lifelong cooperation with Theodosia Maina and Berthold Nock at the NCSR “Demokritos” in Athens stretched far beyond innovative compounds and methods to improve PRS and PRRT to a strong friendship. This friendship soon embraced both families, enormously enjoying frequent shared trips to “discover” Greece—another unique quality of Marion to deeply touch the lives of others.

Marion as a mentor Over 50 PhD students successfully defended their thesis under Marion’s supervision. She inspired the younger and selflessly promoted talent so that many of her students are now leading successful careers. “She took all of her team members under her wing and guided them through whatever scientific hurdles came along, by sharing her network, knowledge, and experience” says Simone Dalm, expressing the gratitude and respect felt by her students. Marion was also a strong advocate for women empowerment, and she was involved in the creation of a female talent programme for women-in-science in Rotterdam.

Worldwide recognition and awards Marion authored over 450 peer-reviewed papers, and her work was always of extremely high quality, scientifically sound and elegantly presented (EANM Plenary lecture in 2002). Marion headed numerous research projects, committees and boards and became a member of the prestigious German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. She won several honors and awards, such as the EANM Marie Curie Award and the AIPES Press and Media Award.

Societies in the Netherlands Marion was a member of the Dutch Society of Nuclear Medicine (NVNG) since 2002. She was a member of the educational committee of the NVNG from 2009 until 2011 to promote education in radiochemistry. During these times, clinical radiochemists were allowed to become regular members of the society and they thank Marion for her overall contribution.

On 16 March 2004, Marion had a first meeting in Groningen with Otto Boerman, Bert Windhorst and Philip Elsinga to discuss a closer collaboration between the radiochemistry groups within the Netherlands. After this first brainstorming meeting that unsurprisingly ended with a nice dinner in downtown Groningen, it was decided to found a Dutch Society of Radiopharmaceutical Chemistry (NKRK). Until now, NKRK meetings are held twice a year with high attendance rates of radiochemists, technicians and related scientists. During the first 10 years, Marion played a crucial role in shaping this successful society by organizing several meetings.

At the EANM Besides her own scientific work, Marion was strongly engaged in EANM life, not just as a member but also in influential positions, such as the Chair of the Translational Molecular Imaging & Therapy Committee from 2013 until 2017, as well as Vice-Chair in 2018 and Senior Advisor in 2019 of the same committee. Marion was also a long-time Scientific Programme Council Member, reviewer, chairperson and invited speaker at our annual congress. Many of us will very well remember the “M2M—Molecule to Man Track” at the congress which she co-initiated, and, moreover, her outstanding Highlights Lecture under the clever and funny title “Gimme gimme gimme those nuclear Super Troupers” in Sweden in 2014.

Until recently, she was actively involved in the latest EANM activity—the Women Empowerment initiative, for which Marion helped create a mentoring programme aimed at young talented women. She believed in young researchers! “I have had the opportunity to grow up with her, as a young scientist. I had admired her ability to follow the entire committee group in a very simple way! She was a leader” emphasizes young researcher Laura Evangelista.

Passionate photographer and blogger, lover of nature (especially of flowers and birds), keen participant of social games, Marion put family first. Always positive, always encouraging with “count your blessings” and “have fun” or

“it’s fun” being some of her favorite phrases. We shall all keep a vivid memory of her dynamic, brilliant and inspiring personality.

It is certain that Marion will be dearly missed by us all. Mostly, she will be missed by her family, her surviving parents, her five sisters, the children she raised together with her loving husband Jan, “her soul-mate” as she always called him. Her pride and joy, her three sons Daan-Jan, Bertram and Pepijn and her little granddaughter Rachel, the apple of her eye.

Declarations

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