Ulpu Saarialho-Kere (1960–2009)

Ulpu Saarialho-Kere, internationally recognized for the depth and breadth of her research and an active member of the European Society for Dermatological Research (ESDR) Board, died 13 September 2009, in Helsinki, Finland, surrounded by her beloved husband (Professor Juha Kere) and family. Born in 1960, she earned her MD (1985) and PhD (1988) degrees from the University of Helsinki, in the same department to which she would eventually return to become assistant professor.

Ulpu undertook her postgraduate training in William Parks's laboratory in the Dermatology Division at Washington University in St Louis, MO, from 1990 to 1993. While in St Louis, Ulpu mastered her investigative skills and by any measure was exceptionally productive. During this time she wrote seven first-authored publications, including three in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, and contributed to several others, leaving behind data that Dr Parks's laboratory is following up to this day. Throughout her career, Ulpu displayed an impressive degree of determination and would seldom, if ever, pause for lunch (although her daily ice cream habit was easily satisfied by the vendor a few doors away).

Upon returning to Finland, Ulpu completed her dermatology training in 1998. She established her own research group in the Department of Dermatology in Helsinki and pursued a full-time research career funded by the Academy of Finland. In 2002, she accompanied Juha to Stockholm, Sweden, first as a visiting scientist and then as professor of dermatology at the Karolinska Institute and as a department chair at the Södersjukhuset in Stockholm. After a period of commuting between Stockholm and Helsinki, Ulpu recently settled back in Helsinki.

Ulpu was elected to the Board of the ESDR in 2006 and was a key member of the local organizing committee for the society’s 2010 Annual Meeting. She was elected to the European Dermatology Forum in 2008.

Many researchers are remembered for their contributions in a particular field. Ulpu's interests were wide and the topics of her publications and contributions diverse, from cancer biology and wound repair in skin and other organ systems to gene identification in inflammatory skin disease. Her observations on matrix metalloproteinase function and expression are particularly noteworthy and provide a detailed understanding of their patterns of activation in many physiological and pathological states. To Ulpu, the most important part of research was always the patient. She wanted to perform clinically relevant research that would eventually benefit patients. Her research was thorough, and she published in high-impact journals.

Ulpu was also an excellent teacher, and she was among the most active PhD supervisors on the medical faculty of the University of Helsinki. Always clear in her message, she demanded productivity, but she was also just and fair, always working herself the hardest. At home, she enjoyed music and led her three children to play flute, guitar, and cello. Often friends were invited to enjoy long dinners carefully prepared by Ulpu and Juha.

In March 2009, Ulpu was appointed to the positions of professor of applied dermatology at the University of Helsinki and chief department physician at the University Hospital. Just a few days later, her illness was discovered. Despite her illness and increasing frailty, she continued to supervise her group, give her inauguration lecture, and complete grant applications.

Ulpu leaves behind not only a devoted family but also a large void in dermatology research. Her collaborators, students, and peers will miss her enormously, as will the members of the ESDR Board. In the mind of her department head (AR), Ulpu's approach to life is reflected in the following little poem by Tao Qian (a classical poet in China in the third century):

“We need to do our best today:  
The years and the months will wait for no-one.”

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