OBITUARY

Bernice Zimmer Brown, MD (1931-2003)

Dr Bernice Zimmer Brown (Figure), past president of the American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (ASOPRS), Altamonte Springs, Fla, and the first woman to be accepted as a resident by the Doheny Eye Institute of the University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles, died on December 24, 2003. At the time of her death, she was a clinical professor of ophthalmology and the fellowship director of ophthalmic plastic, orbital, and reconstructive surgery at the Doheny Eye Institute. She was a founding member of Women in Ophthalmology (WIO), San Francisco, Calif; editor of the Journal of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery from 1997 to 1999; and a member of ASOPRS, of which she was president in 1990. Through her leadership roles at the Doheny Eye Institute, WIO, ASOPRS, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), San Francisco, she leaves behind a legion of ophthalmologists she mentored and numerous colleagues who will miss her intelligence, dedication, quick wit, and poise.

Born and raised in Altoona, Pa, she moved to southern California with her family as a teenager, and in the 1960s, she decided to go to medical school while raising 2 young daughters. Despite being Phi Beta Kappa as an undergraduate at the University of California at Los Angeles, she was told by one medical school to “go home and raise [her] children.” Undeterred, she received her doctor of medicine from USC (where she was elected Alpha Omega Alpha), completed her residency at the Doheny Eye Institute-Los Angeles County USC Medical Center, and finished fellowships in ophthalmic plastic, orbital, and reconstructive surgery at the University of California at San Francisco and the Eye Foundation Hospital in Birmingham, Ala, all the while able to attend every parent-teacher conference and back-to-school night for her daughters, much to their chagrin, they recall.

She opened her practice at Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital in Los Angeles in 1969. From 1985 until her death, she supervised a rotation popular among Doheny/USC residents for its high surgical volume and monthly trips to the Calexico Eye Clinic (next to the US-Mexico border) to provide both medical and surgical eye care to individuals limited by location or poverty. When a large health care corporation threatened to axe the Calexico program (funded by donations and supported by volunteers), she rallied support from her colleagues at Doheny-USC, including Ronald E. Smith, MD, and Alfredo Sadun, MD, to fight the attempt and won. Even as a subspecialist, she sought to improve access to ophthalmological services, and she was one of the first directors of the Eye Care Network, the physician panel for Medicare Eye Services, on whose board she served for more than 25 years.

She was both an inspirational team player and leader. She was a founding member of WIO; president of the California Academy of Ophthalmology, San Francisco, in 1989; the first recipient of the Suzanne Veronneau-Troutman Award from the WIO; Alumnus of the Year from the USC School of Medicine; president of the Los Angeles Society of Ophthalmology; and recipient of the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Doheny-USC Professional Association. In addition, she received the Senior Achievement Award from the AAO and the prestigious Lester T. Jones Anatomy Award from ASOPRS. She also sat on the board of directors of the Doheny Eye Medical Group.

Growing up with few female physician role models, she served as one herself for many ophthalmologists. Writes Barbara Arnold, MD, past president of WIO, “It is a certainty that I, nor many women much younger than I, never felt a generation gap; she stayed in touch with all . . . she was one to take great joy and pride in discovering new young talent.” Starting in 1998, she chaired the first 3 WIO symposia at the annual AAO meeting. These symposia covered clinical, scientific, and social topics and were well attended by both men and women.

Dr Brown was a frequent invited guest lecturer at meetings and organizations because of her expertise in ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgery and her eloquence. In 1975, she founded the Beard-Quickert Study Club named after her mentors at the University of California at San Francisco. She was also a founding member and a former president of the Los Angeles Research Study Club, as she was keenly interested in ophthalmic research.

Her zeal extended beyond ophthalmology; she was a world traveler (she cycled through France, watched the Australian Tennis Open, and saw the rainforests of the Amazon), an avid reader, and a connoisseur of cinema, theater, music, ballet, and fine chocolate. She was also known for her impeccable dress and jewelry.

She was thoughtful and generous, often going out of her way for others. Because she said she knew many women had scrimped and saved through their training, she insisted that the WIO annual retreats be held in tasteful locations offering plenty of recreational diversions.

A professional success story, she always returned to the importance of family and friends. She took pleasure in raising her daughters and “mentees.” Her astute philosophical quips on motherhood, marriage, friendship, and love will be greatly missed. She is survived by her husband, Donald S. Mullins, and 2 daughters, Trudy B. Brown and Melanie L. Brown.

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