

# Testimonial to Dr. Hanna Strawczynski

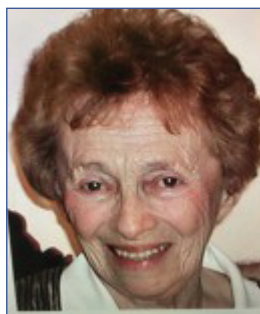
By Ciarán Duffy, MB, BCh, MSc, FRCPC, FRCPI; Rosie Scuccimarri, MD, FRCPC; and Ronald M. Laxer, MDCM, FRCPC

When Ciarán Duffy commenced his career at the Montreal Children's Hospital and McGill University (MCH/McGill) in 1990, he had the distinct privilege to work with an incredible pediatrician named Dr. Hanna Strawczynski. Hanna was a general pediatrician with tremendous skills in providing care to children with many complex problems, including those with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). He had been made aware of her by Ron Laxer, who came to know her when he was a resident at MCH/McGill.

Ron recalls: "I did a mandatory rotation in the Home Care Department of the MCH as a first-year resident in 1977. Hanna had set up the department in 1969 to help manage children with two chronic diseases – hemophilia and thalassemia. Because hemophilic arthropathy was so common in those days, Hanna also saw patients with JIA and other rheumatic diseases. It was on that rotation that I first got my taste of pediatric rheumatology. Perhaps, more importantly, I saw the commitment that she made to every patient (and their families), and the compassion with which she cared for them. In those days, there was not much science to our specialty, but there was an art, and she was a master. It was that experience that inspired me to pursue a career in pediatric rheumatology."

Rosie Scuccimarri was also significantly influenced. "I worked with Dr. Strawczynski, as a pediatric resident rotating through pediatric rheumatology, just before her retirement in 1997. She was an incredible woman. Despite her slight physique, she had such a strong aura about her, and it was clear that she had overcome significant hardships throughout her life and career. She was a great role model especially for young women starting their medical careers. I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from her."

Hanna's influence also extended to her family. Her niece, Ilona Szer, who was Head of Pediatric Rheumatology at Rady



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Children's Hospital in San Diego, before her recent retirement, states "I followed a career in pediatrics, and ultimately pediatric rheumatology, because of my aunt Hanna. She had a huge influence on me, personally, and on my career."

And so it was also for Ciarán who worked with Hanna for seven years. "She taught me so much during that time. She was an amazing role model and mentor. Her commitment to the children and families whom she served was simply extraordinary. She was such a caring person and that care was also extended to young faculty. She was an influential presence, but in a non-threatening way.

Perhaps for me, her greatest influence was in guiding me towards a career in leadership. She, herself, led by example and always had this innate ability to read situations which endeared her to so many. I also had the opportunity to share many social events with her, including at her home, where I got to sample her exquisite and very special Polish vodka. She was such an engaging host."

Dr. Hanna Strawczynski (nee Richter), born in Poland in 1927, was only 12 years old at the commencement of World War 2. She survived the Holocaust, including the Warsaw Ghetto and a slave labour camp. After the war, she completed medical school, trained as a pediatrician, and worked for many years in Warsaw. She ultimately moved to Canada with her husband, the late Oskar Strawczynski, settling in Montreal, where she raised her children, Eva and David. She worked at MCH/McGill for over 30 years, achieving the rank of Associate Professor. Not only was she a survivor of the war, she also survived ovarian cancer. Unfortunately, however, as with many in long-term care facilities in Montreal, and elsewhere throughout Canada, she was unable to survive COVID-19, to which she succumbed on November 26th, 2020.

Hanna left an indelible mark on all of our hearts and we will never forget her. We extend our sincere condolences to Eva and David, and to all of her family. May she forever rest in peace.

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