



### **Dr. Irma Russo**

Irma H. Russo, M.D. passed away on June 25, 2013. She was 71 years old. For the past 22 years Irma worked at Fox Chase Cancer Center; first as director of surgical and clinical pathology and then as director of the molecular endocrinology section of the Breast Cancer Research Laboratory, which she founded in 1975 with her husband, Jose Russo, M.D.

Born in San Rafael, Mendoza, Argentina, she was the daughter of Maria Carmen Martinez de Alvarez and Jose Maria Alvarez. Irma studied medicine at the National University of Cuyo, in Mendoza, Argentina, where she met her husband and true collaborator, Jose. In 1971 they were invited to continue their research in the United States where they built what was to become a 50-plus year career directed at determining the causes of breast cancer and a true means of prevention.

Irma was a pioneer in identifying the mechanisms of breast cancer prevention as mediated by pregnancy and worked towards developing a hormonal treatment for prevention of the disease using the pregnancy hormone Human Chorionic Gonadotropin, and more recently, its replacement by a short amino acid peptide. Together with her husband she published five books and over 200 research articles. In 1994 she founded the League of Women Against Cancer, an organization with the mission of providing education and assistance to women living with cancer.

Her unquenchable curiosity and intellectual dexterity led her into vast innovative territory, such as her queries into the role of circadian rhythm in breast cancer development. At an age when many look to retire, Irma continued to relish the pursuit of knowledge. Her sense of adventure extended into all her pursuits; she played the piano, sang in the Our Lady Help of Christians choir and was an active member of the parish community, and at sixty-six she earned her scuba diving certification.

Overall, Irma had a very distinguished career in research and remained devoted until the end to the mission of understanding the cellular and molecular basis of breast cancer. But she was also a dedicated wife, mother, sister, and friend, always ready to help those in need. In short, a woman of excellence. She will be remembered not only by her many friends, colleagues, and the many scientists she trained and mentored over the years, but also by every human being who was touched by her good nature.

She is survived by her husband and loving daughter, Patricia A. Russo; by her son-in-law, Ronald W. Waite, Jr. and by her sister, Alicia E. Alvarez, Ph.D., as well as several nieces, nephews, an aunt, uncle and cousins.