Dr. Kristy Richards, age 50, was a brilliant physician and scientist, a generous and supportive colleague, an inspirational mentor, and a dear friend that left us much too soon on March 30, 2019. Her light burned bright and touched so many.


Double boarded in both Medical Oncology and Hematology Oncology, she joined the faculty as an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in 2007. At UNC, she published widely on her research in diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, a subtype of non-Hodgkin lymphoma, that is most common in both dogs and people. And so was born her trailblazing career as a
comparative oncologist and researcher which generated insights that benefited both humans and dogs with these diseases. Her work with human lymphoma delved into the genetics of response and resistance to therapy. Kristy was also an exceptional clinical oncologist and wholehearted physician who served countless patients and their families.

In 2015, Kristy returned to Ithaca, New York where she was hired as an associate professor with a dual appointment in the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine in Ithaca and in the Division of Hematology/Medical Oncology at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City. The common theme of all of Kristy’s research strategies was to decipher the causes of lymphoma development and progression and to translate those findings into clinical trials for the improved and individualized treatment of lymphoma in the animal or human patient.

At Cornell, Kristy combined her training in genetics, cell biology, genomics, and immunotherapy to discover genes associated with the human and canine forms of lymphoma. She led multiple inter-institutional collaborative clinical trials that explored cutting edge immunotherapies. Cornell recognized her as a radical collaborator, and an innovator. Kristy served as the chair of the Cornell Veterinary Biobank’s governance committee and was the driving force behind its expansion to promote translational research. While maintaining her internationally recognized comparative cancer research program, she still found time to provide exceptional clinical oncology care to her patients at New York-Presbyterian Hospital.

Throughout her academic career, Kristy authored 60 original research publication and served the greater research and medical community in a number of ways. She was a board member for the North Carolina chapter of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (2010-2015), and was on the Cancer and Leukemia Group B/Alliance for Clinical Oncology Trials Pharmacogenomics and Population’s Pharmacology Committee and Lymphoma Committee from 2011 and 2008, respectively, until her death. She was an active member of the American Society of Hematology and the American Association for Cancer Research, a co-leader of the Progressive
Assessment of Therapeutics program, and was an academic editor for PLoS One and PeerJ.

Kristy was a visionary leader and her dual appointment in both veterinary and human medical schools provided her with a unique vantage point, where bench research and clinical application collided. This was never more clear than during her 2018 Biden Summit speech to thousands where she described being a researcher, a physician, and then a breast cancer patient. “I learned so much more - even given my background - that I knew before about having cancer, that perspective on the other side of the stethoscope.” Throughout her own fight with cancer, she remained curious, and committed to finding ways to treat patients, including herself.

Kristy’s strong circle of friends dates back to her undergraduate days at Cornell University. Her classmates recognized the superintelligence that defined her, as well as her kindness and compassion, which knew no bounds. These friendships grew and multiplied as Kristy navigated her way through her graduate and medical schooling, fellowship, and faculty positions. She thrived in connecting others both at work and in her personal life. Anyone who met Kristy was drawn in by her passion and magnetic personality. If you were lucky enough to be a part of Kristy’s professional or personal circle, you benefitted immensely from her limitless generosity and mentoring. She truly believed in helping others be their best selves and reach their highest potential.

Kristy’s favorite color, purple, permeated everything from her wardrobe to her home, and even her office chairs. She was a devoted Disney fan, visiting at least one park each year, and managed a hat trick in 2016 by visiting the Disney Parks in Florida, California, and Japan all in the same year. Outside of the laboratory and clinical setting, Kristy had a passion for football; she was a true-blue fan of the Buffalo Bills and was an avid participant in the annual Fantasy Football league. She remained a devoted UNC Tar Heels fan, cheering them on during March Madness, to her final days.

Kristy is survived by her parents, a sister, a brother, nieces, a nephew, and many devoted friends who were like family to her. One
word alone could never be chosen to describe a person like Kristy; her friends and colleagues each provided one word to describe Kristy, which was weaved together into a DNA helix in memory of her love of genetics. She leaves a void that will never be filled, but her legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of the many people she empowered - at Cornell and throughout the World.

Written by Cynthia Leifer (chair), Marta Castelhano, and Leni Kaplan