

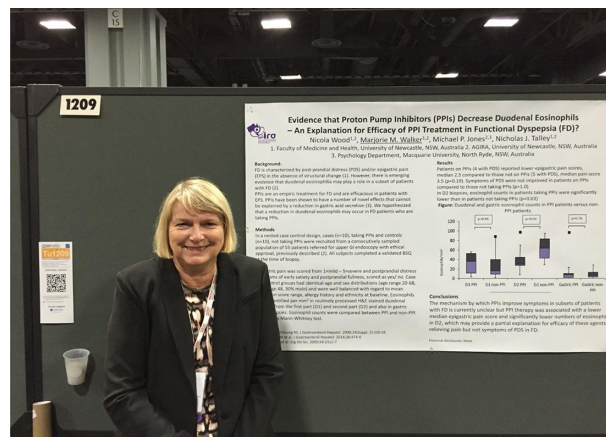
Vale Professor Marjorie M Walker

Professor Marjorie (Marj) M Walker, an esteemed thought leader in anatomical pathology, inspirational educator and passionate researcher, passed away peacefully in Cyprus on 8 May 2024.

Marj was a beloved member of the University of Newcastle community, where she held a teaching and research post as a Professor of Anatomical Pathology from 2012 until she retired in 2022 and moved to live in Cyprus with her husband Peter. Even in retirement Marj continued to actively contribute to research as an Honorary Professor right up until her passing. She was the heart and soul of the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) in Digestive Health in Newcastle and the Australian Gastroenterology Research Alliance (AGIRA). Throughout her career, Marj played a vital role in accurately diagnosing tissue samples and providing trusted guidance to clinicians, especially with difficult diagnostic cases.

Prior to moving to Newcastle, Australia, Marj held an appointment as Reader and Consultant in pathology in the Faculty of Medicine, Imperial College and St Mary's Hospital, London UK. Her path to pathology was fortuitous (and we are grateful fortune favoured her this way). Facing a 2-month gap between the completion of study at Nottingham University and commencing General Practice training, and not wanting to be idle, it was suggested to Marj that she might like to try a trainee position in the histopathology department. As Marj later wrote: 'I thought to myself, 'I actually really like this' and realised that I didn't particularly want to go into General Practice. I wanted to stay looking down the microscope and looking after patients that way. I also really enjoyed the teaching side of academia, which is why I've stayed halftime academic and halftime diagnostic pathologist.' It was after she married and wanted to move to London to join her husband that she approached the pathology department at St Mary's Hospital in London to see if there were any jobs available, and with a recommendation from her colleague and mentor Alan Stevens, she was appointed as a temporary lecturer, teaching and researching in histopathology. Marj's passion for looking down the microscope and caring for patients in her own unique way has shone through in all aspects of her work throughout her subsequent illustrious career. She was a brilliant diagnostician and had an inquisitive mind that served her so well in practice and research.

In addition to her role as an academic at the University of Newcastle, Marj was the Co-Director of the University of Newcastle's Priority Research Centre for Digestive Health and Neurogastroenterology, where she worked closely with colleagues in gastroenterology, basic science and pathology. She then was the driving force in setting up a nationwide coalition of outstanding researchers dedicated to advancing the field of luminal gastroenterology in Australia, AGIRA. Her work underpinned the successful bid for a highly competitive NHMRC CRE at the University of Newcastle. This collaborative work generated many and varied research questions to investigate, some of which became research higher degree topics for PhD students. These students and Marj's cosupervisors were fortunate indeed to experience her generosity and spirit of inquiry, in equal measures, with her exacting standards for exceptional quality research.



Prof Marjorie Walker presenting a poster at Digestive Diseases Week

Marj's expertise as a histopathologist was unparalleled, and her contributions to gastroenterology and medicine were vast and significant. With nearly 200 peer-reviewed publications to her name, including over 50 reviews, Marjorie's impact on the medical community was profound. She was without dispute the world's leading duodenal pathologist. Her original work resulted in the identification of novel duodenal pathology (in particular, increased eosinophils) in functional dyspepsia (a disorder originally thought to be free of any structural changes). Marjorie was famous for saying 'there is no pain without pathology somewhere' and in this case was proven correct. She also identified the link between colonic spirochetosis and diarrhoea-predominant irritable bowel syndrome, describing the novel pathology (increased colonic eosinophils); until then colonic spirochetes were considered by most to be irrelevant commensal bacteria. Other research areas where she had a major international impact and was a leading expert include the pathology of coeliac disease, *Helicobacter pylori* gastritis (where she was an early pioneer), eosinophilic gastrointestinal diseases, diverticular disease and prostate cancer. Marj was also a brilliant educator. She reformed the University of Newcastle medical school curriculum as deputy dean and brought pathology alive for students.

Marj was also famous for the dinners she arranged at major international congresses for her colleagues. These were



From left to right: research meeting at United European Gastroenterology Week: Prof Lars Agreus, Prof Nick Talley, Prof Marjorie Walker and Prof Mike Jones

always the highlight social events at these meetings, and all those invited felt especially privileged to be there to share the food, wine, ideas and stories.

Marj will be remembered not only for her professional accomplishments but also for her genuine, kind and caring nature. She touched the lives of many patients, colleagues and students throughout her career, leaving behind a legacy of excellence and compassion.

Professor Marjorie Walker is deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing her. Her memory will live on in the hearts of those she inspired and taught, and her contributions to the field of pathology will continue to impact the lives of many for decades to come.

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