

GOING FAR TOGETHER: A TRIBUTE TO ARTI HURRIA, MD

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” This proverb was Dr. Arti Hurria’s personal motto and has echoed throughout the close-knit geriatric oncology community since her tragic death on November 7, 2018, from injuries sustained in a car accident. Dually trained as a geriatrician and medical oncologist, Arti was a tireless advocate for older adults with cancer, beloved geriatric oncology leader, and encouraging mentor to an entire generation of cancer and aging researcher (Figure 1). During her investiture presentation as the George Tsai Family Chair in Geriatric Oncology at City of Hope National Medical Center, Arti described her dream that “one day, all older adults with cancer will receive personalized tailored care, utilizing evidence-based medicine with a multidisciplinary approach.”

Geriatric oncology was truly Arti’s calling. She was initially inspired to enter medicine by her physician parents, who taught her the power of loving your patients. I (H.J.C.) had the pleasure of serving as one of Arti’s mentors for almost 20 years. As a mentee, Arti had brilliant ideas and always came back with something even better than what was suggested. In the true spirit of mentorship, in recent years, the mentor often learned more from the mentee.

I can still remember Arti’s initial call. She was starting her first faculty position at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and said, “I have a crazy idea and wonder what you think.” Her idea was to develop a self-administered geriatric assessment to enhance our understanding of older adults in cancer clinical trials and ultimately improve patient outcomes. I said that to the contrary, I thought it was a great idea and that if she was committed to it, I would be happy to help. She was, and the rest is history. Arti orchestrated a small pilot,¹ then a cancer cooperative group-wide feasibility study,² followed by development of a chemotherapy toxicity tool^{3,4} via the Cancer and Aging Research Group (CARG). Putting her personal motto into practice, Arti founded CARG as a grassroots collaboration among dedicated researchers nationwide.⁵ Arti’s only requirement for membership was a desire to help older adults with cancer. CARG has since grown into a robust research community with a focus on mentoring junior investigators and those new to the field. Throughout her remarkable career, Arti led the charge to improve the evidence base for treating older adults with cancer.^{6–8} In collaboration with Drs. William Dale and Supriya Mohile,



Figure 1. Arti Hurria, MD. Photo provided by City of Hope.

Arti had recently embarked on a new effort to develop a sustainable geriatric oncology research infrastructure with support from a National Institute on Aging (NIA) R21/R33 grant.

In addition to her dedication to helping older adults with cancer, Arti championed geriatrics expertise across all subspecialties. In the American Geriatrics Society (AGS), Arti served as past co-chair of the Medical Subspecialties Section. In collaboration with AGS, the NIA, and the Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine, Arti supported awardees of the NIA Grants for Early Medical/Surgical Specialists’ Transition to Aging Research (GEMSSTAR) as principal investigator of their U13 conference series. True to her spirit, Arti always sought new opportunities to pay it forward.

As one of Arti’s many mentees, I (M.L.W.) most admired how she led with grace and kindness. In her numerous well-deserved leadership roles including serving on the American Society for Clinical Oncology board of directors, co-chair of the Cancer in the Older Adult Committee of the Alliance for Clinical Trials in Oncology, director of the Center for Cancer and Aging at City of Hope, past president of the International Society of Geriatric Oncology, and past chair of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network Older Adult Oncology Guidelines Panel, Arti actively sponsored her colleagues and mentees, opening doors for others to shine and develop their own leadership skills.

As a mentor, Arti was generous with her wisdom and encouragement and often reminded mentees of how proud she was of them. I once asked Arti how she honed her impeccable presentation skills and she laughed, “Lots of practice to my dog Biscuit.” Arti modeled an aspirational approach to work-life balance. When she had a meeting in Chicago followed by one in Washington, DC, Arti would fly home in between to take her daughter to school or have dinner with her family. She did her best work on planes. (In honor of Arti, part of this tribute was prepared on a plane.)

Arti was at the heart of the geriatric oncology community and will be dearly missed. As our commitment to her lasting legacy, we will continue to go far together.

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