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OBITUARY

Lynette Scott (1954–2012): a force of nature



Lynette Scott died suddenly on 2 February 2012 in Massachusetts, following pulmonary embolism. Her untimely death will ultimately leave a void with those who were fortunate to know her personally and those who worked with her professionally. Lynette is survived by her husband, Alan and sons Nicholas 22 and Joseph 18.

Lynette was born in 1954 in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and was fiercely proud of the fact. After obtaining her undergraduate degree at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, Lynette moved to England, obtaining her Masters in Biomolecular Organization from Birkbeck College, London. Following a productive and stimulating period in which she worked with world leaders in early mammalian development, including David Whittingham, Robin Lovell-Badge and Anne McLaren, Lynette embarked on her ultimate career as a clinical embryologist – a professional career starting as Embryologist at Kings College Hospital London in 1984 and culminating as Laboratory Director at the Fertility Centers of New England (since 2003) by way of Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Adelaide and a series of internationally renowned centres in the United States, including Cedars Sinai, Johns Hopkins, Walter Reed, and the University of Washington, Seattle. Lynette obtained her PhD from the University of London in 1997 studying the in-vitro development of mouse embryos and achieved board certification as a High Complexity Laboratory Director (HCLD) by the American Board of Bioanalysis, the highest designation for a Lab Director.

Lynette was widely acknowledged as an outstanding embryologist who paid great attention to detail and who had a huge passion for embryos, embryology and life in all its forms. Her approach to work was characteristically intense, but also methodical and she did not suffer fools gladly. Her main contribution to the field of assisted reproduction was the investigation of fertilization events and embryo morphology, specifically zygote scoring systems. In an era where blastocyst culture and transfer has become virtual dogma, the quiet but insistent voice of the oocyte and zygote has

crept back into clinical embryology. This is largely as a result of effective, commercially-available time-lapse photography systems for embryo morphokinetic analysis – which Lynette was instrumental in developing. Consequently, we may be on the verge of a quiet revolution in embryology whereby very early events determine embryo viability rather than the high energy excursions of extended culture.

A great believer in training and education, Lynette sought to guide her staff and students to be the best embryologists they could be by sharing her vast knowledge and encouraging others to always learn more and push themselves. One of the many 'Lynette teaching tools' was to sit on the laboratory floor discussing which embryos to transfer for specific patients – truly personalized medicine! Her many academic contributions to the field of assisted reproduction include her numerous publications focussing on research that directly impacts outcomes in fertility patients, serving as Editor and ad hoc reviewer for journals and, of course, her familiar presence on the international fertility speaker 'circuit'. Lynette was a member of many professional organizations including Society for the Study of Fertility, European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology, American Society for Reproductive Medicine, American Society of Andrology, and the Society for the Study of Reproduction. More recently, Lynette served as a valued, productive and influential member of the Executive Committee of Alpha Scientists in Reproductive Medicine, where her creative and lively approach to education and her ability to reach out to junior scientists in our field will always be remembered.

Away from her professional commitments, Lynette served on the board of ABC (A Better Chance) house – a non-profit organization (www.abcmasconomet.org) whose mission is "to provide academically talented minority students with an outstanding secondary school education so that they may proceed to excellence in college, and eventually go on to assume positions of leadership and responsibility in American Society". She also made numerous contributions to Rosie's Place, a homeless women's shelter (www.rosies.org). Once an avid equestrian, Lynette loved all creatures – large, small and microscopic, and would often have a small menagerie of stray cats living with her. She was also a keen gardener and photographer.

Lynette could talk to anyone – colleagues, students, eminent professors, taxi drivers, bazaar traders and belly dancers – all of them received the same intense focus, scrutiny and no small measure of warmth. Lynette had the rare ability to engage with all people regardless of rank, race or religion and was never afraid to take on anyone or open a can of worms if it needed opening – and sometimes even when it didn't. She had an interesting and credible word to say on almost every subject and could never be described as dull. When you think of Lynette you think of the 'F' word – or several of them: fearless, fearsome, feisty, free spirit, free thinker, a fighter and a force of nature. She was all of those things and more with a 'work hard/play hard' mentality. Dynamic, full of opinions and the gumption to argue her corner, Lynette was a wonderful cocktail of charm, irreverence and humour – truly 'once met – never forgotten'. It

was a great honour and privilege to know her. Our thoughts and prayers go out to her family and colleagues.

Alan Thornhill, Basak Balaban
on behalf of Alpha (Scientists in Reproductive Medicine)
Executive Board
P.O. Box 754 3076, Worb, Switzerland

Joe Hill, Alison Finn
*Fertility Centers of New England, 20 Pond Meadow Drive,
Suite 205, Reading, MA 01867, United States*