



OBITUARIES

Sarah Walters

Peymané Adab, Tom Marshall



Sarah Walters was born in St Helier Hospital, Surrey, on 14 October 1958. She grew into a remarkable woman who has inspired many. Nobody could meet her without being impressed by her energy, her intelligence, and her dedication.

Her achievements are many and admirable for anyone to accomplish. However, Sarah was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis (CF) when she was 10, in an era where survival beyond the teens was almost unknown, and despite her wish to study medicine from the age of 3 years, she was told she could not become a doctor. Initially unable to study medicine, she studied microbiology at the University of Surrey, graduating with a first in 1980. She persuaded St George's Hospital Medical School that she was worth a place, and graduated in 1985 with distinction in medicine, the first medical graduate with cystic fibrosis. She outlined her experiences and some of her challenges as a doctor and patient in an article published 30 years ago in *The BMJ*.^[1]

After house officer and senior house officer posts in London, including a spell at the Royal Brompton Hospital, she moved to Birmingham to take up a medical registrar post specialising in respiratory medicine. She later specialised in public health medicine, undertaking research into care for specialist medical conditions, including cystic fibrosis, and the health effects of air pollution. She was appointed lecturer and then senior lecturer in public health and epidemiology at the University of

Birmingham and served on government advisory committees on specialist care and the committee on the medical effects of air pollution. She also acted as an adviser for the CF Trust on their research and medical advisory committee and other specialist working groups. In 1994 she set up and ran the Masters in public health degree at the University of Birmingham, pioneering a modular approach and a distance learning option for several modules. Sarah led the programme for over 10 years, before she retired in 2006. Her former students include public health specialists, directors, and professors of public health across the world. Every Birmingham MPH graduate is a part of her legacy. Sarah also enjoyed talking to parents of children with CF, and tried to inspire those following her to achieve their dreams. In 2004 she was awarded an OBE for services to medicine.

Sarah lived life to the full. In addition to her medical work and contributions, she was a keen sportswoman and played cricket for her county, football for the university. She was a good junior athlete and completed a half marathon, a 100 km cycle ride, and many other challenges. She was also a motorbike enthusiast, talented musician (grade 8 piano, playing in a rock band), linguist (fluent in Russian), and was one below a black belt at Tae Kwan Do. In later adulthood she was a keen skier and ski instructor, Nordic walking instructor, aerobic and step instructor, and a qualified fitness instructor. She joked that in retirement she was doing more for public health than when she was working. Sarah also had a great love of nature. In retirement, she helped her husband, Stephen, to run a manufacturing business, and the couple bought Alvecote Wood, an ancient woodland wildlife site near Tamworth, which they managed for wildlife and community groups. Sarah did not do anything by halves. In 2014 they were awarded the Royal Forestry Society award for the best small woodland in England. She also studied a professional photography course and enjoyed teaching others the art of photography in Alvecote Wood and for the Tame Valley Wetlands project.

Sarah identified life's most important lesson as never to give up. This was literally true. Staying healthy required her to devote as much time and energy to physical training as a professional athlete. Once asked how she would like to be remembered, she said as somebody who made a difference, not only to the lives of people, but to the planet too. You did, Sarah!

Sarah leaves her husband, Stephen Briggs.

Biography

Senior clinical lecturer in public health (b 1958; q St George's Hospital Medical School, 1985; OBE, FRCP, FFPH), died from complications after a chest infection on 8 April 2018

1 Walters S. A doctor despite a disability. *BMJ* 1988;297:1665-6.

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