

## Obituary

**Eugenia Calle: In Memoriam (1952–2009)****Christine B. Ambrosone**

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The American Association for Cancer Research, the American Cancer Society (ACS), and the cancer research community at large mourns the loss of one of its leading cancer epidemiologists, Dr. Eugenia (Jeanne) Calle, whose life abruptly ended in a violent assault on February 17, 2009. Jeanne, an associate editor for *Cancer Research*, made numerous important scientific contributions in her lifetime, mentored many budding scientists, and was an inspiration to her multitude of friends and colleagues. She was passionate about public health and her research, and worked tirelessly to uncover approaches to reduce risk of cancer, yet she also maintained a vivaciousness and zest for living that was contagious. As so many of us in the cancer research community have been affected, Jeanne's husband Rick lived for several years with cancer, and finally succumbed to the disease in 2006. Carmen Rodriguez, researcher at ACS and perhaps Jeanne's closest friend, also fought cancer for a number of years and just recently died from it. During their lifetimes, Jeanne was a constant support for both of them, fighting cancer on both the personal and the professional level. Despite this adversity and sorrow, or perhaps because of it, Jeanne seemed to manage to wring every drop of joy that she could out of life. We shared more than a few tears and laughs together over the years, as did many others, and she will be sorely missed by the many, many people whose lives she touched and whose careers she affected.

Calle, a native of Ohio, received her bachelor's degree from Columbia University, and went on to obtain a doctorate in the Department of Preventive Medicine, College of Medicine, at the Ohio State University. Her earliest work was in environmental and occupational health, at Oak Ridge National Laboratory from 1979 to 1984, and the Centers for Disease Control from 1984 to 1989. She joined the American Cancer Society in 1989, where she began as Director, Study Management Group, in Epidemiology and Statistics, was promoted to Director, Analytic Epidemiology in Epidemiology and Surveillance in 1999, and more recently, to Vice President of Epidemiology. Calle was also an adjunct professor in the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University, served on the Board of Scientific Counselors to the director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and was on a number of advisory boards, working groups, and peer review panels. She authored or co-authored close to 200 articles, many with seminal and far-reaching findings. Jeanne retired two weeks ago from the ACS, looking forward to the days ahead of enjoying a new life with her fiancé, balanced with professional consulting.

At the ACS, Calle played a major role working on the Cancer Prevention Study (CPS) II, which enrolled and is following more than one million people. This cohort has yielded important information on risk factors for numerous cancers, and much of Calle's research was focused on women's cancers, particularly the



effects of hormone replacement on risk. Perhaps her greatest contributions to public health though, and her major interests, were the role of physical activity and obesity in cancer risk and mortality. The publication of her landmark article on the relationship between cancer mortality and overweight and obesity had an enormous impact on the research community, showing that death rates among those with a body mass index (BMI) greater than 40 were more than 50% higher from all cancers than among those of normal weight (1). As Calle pointed out in this article, "more than 90,000 deaths per year from cancer might be avoided if everyone in the adult population could maintain a BMI under 25.0 throughout life." Although there is substantial research on the role of obesity in risk of cancer, these results consider cancer deaths, which may also reflect the role of obesity on cancer diagnosis or treatment, and on disease recurrence. It is likely that this influential article has played a role, at least in part, in raising awareness of the seriousness of the obesity epidemic, and the increased public health measures to reduce overweight in the United States. Calle was also passionate about the importance of regular physical activity in cancer prevention, supported by findings from the CPS II in relation to a number of human cancers (2–5). In fact, she had a reputation for dragging her ACS colleagues to the gym at lunchtime for their daily exercise.

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Calle was also instrumental in starting up the CPS III, continuing to recruit new cohort members to address additional questions in cancer prevention. She was a participant in the Cohort Consortium, coordinated by the NCI, which pools data from a number of large cohort studies to have the power to address the role of genetic susceptibility in cancer risk, and was highly regarded as an outstanding collegial collaborator.

Clearly, Jeanne Calle had an enormous impact on our understanding of cancer risk and prevention, and her important

contributions to cancer epidemiology and public health will live on for years. For those who knew her, her loss takes on a much more personal note, and we mourn the loss of an invaluable colleague, mentor, and friend.

### Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed.

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