With great sorrow, we offer a tribute to our friend Caroline (Caren) Hall, who died at the age of 73 on December 10, 2012, of a respiratory infection complicating a chronic illness. Some of us knew and loved her as a friend, fellow investigator, and companion during the formation of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS); many of us worked with her on committees; others of us knew and loved her as a mentor and colleague; and all of us are profoundly saddened by her death.

Caren was a beautiful woman, but more important she had a beautiful mind. Her research on respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and herpesvirus 6 (HHV-6) was fundamental, precisely planned and conducted, and artfully and succinctly described. In addition, she had a literary flair, an expression of which was illustrated through her poetry. Many of her writings used verse to lighten subject matter, amuse, and then make the point. Moreover, her artistic bent extended to ceramics, metal work, and books, and many colleagues still possess personal gifts that she made with her art. One colleague in particular fondly remembers the teacups that he and his wife treasure and use daily.

Caren’s interest in medicine was fostered by her father, Burtis Breese, a practicing pediatrician in her native hometown of Rochester, NY, who, despite a busy practice, performed important clinical and epidemiologic studies on group A streptococcal infections. She idolized him and founded an award in his name given yearly by PIDS for outstanding, peer-reviewed clinical research by practicing physicians.

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Caren’s education included a degree from Wellesley College, where she majored in chemistry with a minor in poetry. She then attended medical school at the University of Rochester and completed her residency in pediatrics at Yale. During a postdoctoral fellowship at Yale, she married Bill Hall, now Professor of Medicine at Rochester, and accompanied him to Hiroshima, Japan, to study the effects of radiation. Bill and Caren returned to the United States in 1971, joining the faculty at Rochester, where Caren began her rapid rise to Professor of Pediatrics. At the same time, they raised 3 children, each of whom is now a successful adult.

Caren’s writings, including research papers, book chapters, committee statements, abstracts, and poetry, are voluminous and are a pleasure to read. Although the subject matter she chose covered a wide range of pediatric infectious diseases, she will be principally remembered for her extensive and groundbreaking studies of the incidence, clinical consequences, and pathogenesis of RSV, influenza, and human HHV-6 infections. For example, PubMed lists 109 publications on RSV by Caren.

Naturally, Caren’s counsel was in demand. She was appointed to the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Infectious Diseases (the Redbook Committee) in 1984 and remained on the committee in various roles until 2006. She was its chairperson from 1991 to 1995. As Chair and throughout her tenure, she was an active participant whose opinions were evidence-based, carefully articulated, and informative. Also characteristic was her respect for and friendship with fellow committee members. The 2006 Red Book was dedicated to her. In addition to her term as Chair and her contributions to multiple statements and guidelines, she was an associate editor of the 1986, 1988, and 1997 editions of Red Book. In the dedication, Caren was aptly noted to “give her time, energy, love and passion to her family, patient care, teaching, research, and service to local, national, and international venues.” Evidence of her leadership is the fact that Dr Hall served on the board of the Infectious Diseases Society of America from 1987 through 1991. Caren was also on the Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP) from 1987 to 1996. During her years on the ACIP, Caren not only contributed knowledgeably and perceptively to the vaccine discussions, she frequently added 2 of her other talents: one was her poetry verses, which enhanced and
lightened the often heavy dialogue, and the other was the delicious samples of her culinary talents in the form of cookies and cakes she had prepared for her fellow members.

Not surprisingly, Caren accomplishments were extensive and she received many awards—too numerous to mention here—that included election to the Institute of Medicine, the Royal College of Physicians, the Clinical Virology Award of the Pan American Society for Clinical Virology, the Distinguished Physician Award of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, and, perhaps most tellingly, 10 annual teaching awards from the pediatric housestaff at Rochester.

However, we fear that all of the above does not capture the true essence of Caren Hall; she possessed such grace and charm that everyone who knew her thought of her as a friend. In relation to the PIDS, one of her colleagues remembers well how crucial she was in the Society’s embryonic state in the 1980s and that she served as its president from 1991 to 1993. One can rarely say that someone is irreplaceable, but if anyone fits that word it is Caren Hall. Although the whole pediatric infectious diseases community mourns her death, those of us who knew and loved her will feel an acute sense of loss.

Caren’s love of poetry leads us to conclude with a quotation from a poem by an American woman, Louisa Carroll Thomas, titled “What is Charm?” that well describes the person who was Caren Hall.

“A subtle grace of heart and mind that flows with tactful sympathy... A quick responsiveness in word and deed, A dignity and stateliness at need, The will to follow or the art to lead. She to whom this most gracious gift is known Has life’s great potent factor for her own, And rules alike the cottage and the throne”

Stanley A. Plotkin,1 Georges Peter,2 and Samuel Katz3
1University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; 2Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island; 3Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

Caroline Breese Hall, MD, was an exceedingly accomplished and prominent member of the University of Rochester faculty and simultaneously one of the most humble, thoughtful, and generous individuals in the medical center.

She was an exceptionally astute clinician on the infectious diseases (ID) service and, although she was held in the highest esteem, on rounds she often found time to play with pediatric patients and talk at length with their families. It was not uncommon to see her with a baby on her hip during rounds. At times, it was almost like watching the Pied Piper as people would gather around to hear her explain why the patient had a certain manifestation of an infectious disease.

Community pediatricians and family medicine physicians in the Rochester area found Caren to be a natural and beloved colleague. Having grown up in her father’s pediatric practice observing specimen and data collection for his studies of streptococcal illness, Caren was genuinely curious about the infections her colleagues were seeing in their primary care offices. For decades she published an Infectious Disease Newsletter, reporting on local surveillance of infectious disease syndromes seen in private offices along with laboratory findings from the University. Caren’s cordial relationships with colleagues across the community greatly supported her diverse research studies and fostered collaboration between the community physicians and the University faculty.

Empathy was one of Caren’s enduring qualities. She was also quick with a compliment and often had a kind word for all. I remember an initial meeting with a colleague in Neonatology in Rochester. When the colleague learned that I was working with Caren Hall, she specifically wanted me to know about the first time she gave Grand Rounds as a junior faculty member. Soon after her presentation, Caren wrote a note to her thanking her for an excellent talk and welcoming her to Rochester and the University of Rochester faculty. I believe she carries that note with her today. It was an unnecessary act of kindness that went above the usual collegiality that is typical in Rochester. It was typical for Caren. She made baby blankets for faculty children and never forgot a birthday or special event, often providing a gift with a personal touch.

Younger women faculty admired her not only for her knowledge and body of work but also for her understated feminism. She dressed with a feminine flair at work and was very comfortable with both her profession and her gender. She entered medicine at a time when women often stayed at home, and although she could relay some examples of discrimination early in her career, she used them only as “teachable moments” for the rest of us, and she made sure she supported all of her colleagues in need.

Caren also enjoyed having fun. She created ID-themed games modeled after the National Public Radio show “Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me” and would teach with her own special
flair. She was a regular attendee at Morning Report and ID conference right up until a few days before her death, and she continued to participate in teaching at both venues.

Caren’s playfulness extended beyond work. Most people may not know that although Caren was sophisticated and cosmopolitan, she kept many animals and birds on the suburban “farm” where she and Bill and their 3 children lived. Hilarious stories from this menagerie became legends in her laboratory—the goat that got on the school bus, the donkey that had to be coaxed home after rolling in newly planted lawns across the street, and the goose that had to come to work with her because it was inconsolable at home when she left.

Caren also had a unique sense of style. She drove a Checker cab when her children were young because she and Bill could set up a play table in the back seat for long rides to their family home in Michigan. She was disappointed when she had to give up her last Checker. Despite the change of vehicle, she continued to travel to her beloved Torch Lake cottage in Michigan, the site of family weddings and gatherings, and always seemed rejuvenated on her return.

Dedication to medicine was the core of Caren’s identity, and her brilliant career is evident in her research and leadership in Pediatric Infectious Diseases. Her legacy as a colleague, role model, and friend is equally important to those of us lucky enough to have worked with her. Her ability to set the bar high while conveying confidence and empathy was rare, as was the gratitude and appreciation she expressed. We will miss her deeply.

Mary Caserta and Christine Long
University of Rochester

CAROLINE BREESE HALL

OBITUARY

We learned with great sadness that that Caroline (Caren) Breese Hall passed away on December 10, 2012. Caren was an absolute icon in the field of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, and she was an inspiration to many physicians worldwide. She was a founding member of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS), and she served as its 5th President and was the Society’s Historian. Caren’s research on respiratory viruses changed the way the world perceived these common pediatric infections. Her seminal studies answered many of the most fundamental and important epidemiological questions about respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), including the mode of transmission, potential for repeated infections, and burden of illness in high-risk and healthy children. Using observation in clinical studies, as well as surveillance in various clinical settings, she also demonstrated the manifestations of RSV disease and reinfection in adults, and she helped define the high-risk groups for RSV infection, which we recognize today. Caren’s later work on herpesvirus 6 (HHV6) utilized modern molecular techniques to define the contribution of this herpesvirus to febrile seizures, emergency room visits, and hospitalizations in children, and to describe transplacental transmission of reactivated chromosomally integrated HHV-6, a novel mechanism of infection. Caren set the bar for clinical and translational research in pediatric infectious diseases, and she will evermore serve as an inspiration to pediatricians everywhere.

Caren also exemplified the ideals of the PIDS through her tremendous dedication to service. She served as Chair of the AAP Committee on Infectious Diseases (Red Book Committee), and the 2006 edition of the Red Book was dedicated to her. In addition, she was a member of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices; the Board of Scientific Counselors for the National Center of Infectious Diseases; and numerous committees for the National Academies of Science, the Institute of Medicine, and the American Board of Pediatrics. She was elected to the Institute of Medicine and the Royal College of Physicians. Her numerous honors included the Distinguished Physician and Distinguished Service Awards from the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, the Infectious Disease Society of America’s John Franklin Enders Lectureship, the Pan American Society of Virology’s Award, and the Robert M. Chanock Lifetime Achievement Award.

We remember Caren not only for these prodigious accomplishments—remarkable by any standard—but also and especially for her warmth, generosity, humanity, and humor. She served as a role model for many women in medicine as a clinician, academician, and researcher who was totally feminine and caring and at the
same time productive and objective. Many of the book chapters she authored and many of the meetings she chaired began or concluded with her poetry. Caren’s small acts of kindness set a standard to which many of us aspire: her notes of congratulation and encouragement, handwritten on self-illustrated stationery, are treasured by many of us in the field. Caren was absolutely unique, and she was an inspiration to everyone in pediatrics, academic medicine, and clinical research. We will miss her dearly.

Janet Englund, MD
President of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, Department of Pediatrics, University of Washington Seattle Children’s Hospital

Ruth Karron, MD
Professor, International Health Director, Center for Immunization Research Director, Johns Hopkins Vaccine Initiative, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University Baltimore, Maryland

Penelope Denney, MD
Past-President of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, Professor of Pediatrics, Brown Medical School Director, Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, Hasbro Children’s Hospital, Providence, Rhode Island

David Kimberlin, MD
President-Elect of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, Professor of Pediatrics, The University of Alabama at Birmingham