In Memoriam: Martha Dukes Yow, MD

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Martha Dukes Yow, MD, editor of the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* from 1983 to 1988, died 29 May 2005, in Houston, after a long illness. She is survived by her husband, Dr. Robert Roessler; her children, Ellard, John, and Katherine; and her grandchildren, Katy, Elizabeth, Catherine, and Megan. Dr. Yow left an indelible mark on the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) as one of its early fellows, as one of a handful of women in a male-dominated academic medical world, and as a pioneer in the specialty of pediatric infectious diseases.

Dr. Yow was the consummate clinical investigator—one who made unique contributions as she seized on and investigated a series of what we now call emerging infections: epidemic staphylococcal infections in the 1950s, congenital rubella syndrome in the 1960s, neonatal group B streptococcal disease in the 1970s, and congenital cytomegalovirus infections in the 1980s and 1990s. These studies resulted in 55 of her >100 publications. She established the Section of Infectious Diseases in the Department of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine in 1957 and was its head until 1982. During this era, she became chairman of the Board of Scientific Counselors of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (from 1971 to 1975), member and then chairman of the Committee on Infectious Diseases of the American Academy of Pediatrics (from 1970 to 1978), and editor of the 1974 Red Book.

Martha Dukes was born in Talbotton, Georgia, in 1922. Her childhood was typical of the times in the South, amid a family deeply touched by the Great Depression. She was an excellent student and made an early decision to become a physician—a decision firmly supported by her “stay-at-home,” intelligent, energetic, and strong mother. She entered medical school at 18 years old, surrounded by the patriarchal environment of >60 years ago. Her toughness and optimism overshadowed the injustices and heartbreaks that she experienced; by wit, grit, and gumption, she succeeded. After graduation from the Medical College of South Carolina during World War II, she entered obstetric and then pediatric residencies at North Carolina Baptist Hospital and at Bowman Gray School of Medicine and Duke University Medical Center. One of her colleagues at Bowman Gray, an internist named Ellard Yow, became her husband. As Ellard moved for military duty and then an infectious diseases fellowship, Martha became a full-time wife and the mother of 3 children. During these years, she had brief forays into part-time pediatric practices. She had no guide for being a physician, wife, and mother of 3; she felt the isolation from her profession and the guilt of not being a perfect wife and mother, but she blazed the trail for others in what she called a “balancing act.”

When the Yows moved back to Texas, Martha began her research career as an instructor in Pediatrics and Research Fellow in Poliomyelitis, working in the laboratory of Joseph Melnick from 1950 to 1952. Just as Martha’s academic career was being launched, Ellard was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease. During his long illness, which led to his untimely death, Ellard Yow received the first Bristol Award from the IDSA. Despite the personal tragedy of losing her young husband, Dr. Yow’s grace and courage allowed her to raise her 3 children and to enthusiastically pursue the academic career that she had dreamed about as a young woman. She did this with charm, wit, and brilliance—and, of course, with success. She was admired, and she will be missed.