

Professor Ulpu Saarialho-Kere 1960–2009



Professor Ulpu Saarialho-Kere passed away on 13 September 2009 in Helsinki at the age of 49 years. She graduated from the Medical Faculty of the University of Helsinki in 1985 and received her PhD from the Department of Pharmacology of the University of Helsinki in 1988. Soon after completing her PhD she became interested in dermatology and, together with her husband Juha Kere and two sons, Ulpu travelled to the USA to take up a post-doctoral fellowship in Washington University in St Louis. She worked in Professor William Parks' laboratory in the Dermatology Division in 1990–1993 studying matrix metalloproteinases and their role in wound healing and disease. After returning to Helsinki she specialized in dermatology and venereology and established her own research group. She became Associate Professor in experimental dermatology in 1996 and completed her specialty training in 1998. Ulpu was a devoted scientist and continued her research career as a senior scientist in the Academy of Finland during 1998–2003. In 2002, she followed her husband Juha to Stockholm, first as a visiting scientist, then, in 2003 she was nominated Professor of Dermatology at the Karolinska Institute, and department chair at the Södersjukhuset in Stockholm. However, she also continued her research group in Helsinki and practically benefited both universities with very active interactive work. Since Ulpu was also the mother of three children, she considered the interests of her children and returned to Helsinki at the time when her sons were of high-school age. Ulpu then worked as a Clinical Instructor at the Department of Dermatology, at the University of Helsinki, while retaining an adjunct position in Stockholm. She was appointed to a joint Professorship in Applied Dermatology at the University of Helsinki and Chief Department Physician at the University Hospital in March 2009. Only a few days thereafter her severe illness, a rare and aggressive type of cancer, was discovered.

Ulpu was a determined scientist and academic educator. She was among the most active PhD supervisors in the Medical Faculty of the University of Helsinki. She demanded productivity, but also remembered to give recognition for good work. She was an author of more than 130 original publications representing an exceptionally wide field. Her research interests concentrated on matrix metalloproteinases in wound repair, skin cancer, cutaneous and gastrointestinal inflammatory conditions, molecular mechanisms of discoid lupus erythematosus and the genetic background of psoriasis.

In 2006 she was elected to the board of the European Society for Dermatological Research (ESDR) and she was an active member of the local organizing committee for the annual meeting of the ESDR to be held in Helsinki in 2010.

As her co-workers and colleagues, we always admired her efficiency and organizational ability, not only in the clinic, but also in respect of her family life in two cities – she never even complained of being tired. In her free time Ulpu enjoyed music and travelling, often in France, with her family.

Despite her illness and stressful therapies, she continued to supervise her research group, gave her inauguration lecture in May, and filed grant applications in late summer. Her illness cut short her promising career and many ongoing projects. She is deeply missed by her husband, two sons and daughter, and by a large group of friends, collaborators and colleagues around the world.

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