ALL ACADEMICS AND STAFF AT UCSD
ALL STUDENTS AT UCSD
SUBJECT: Passing of Dr. Helen M. Ranney, Pioneering Woman
                Physician-Scientist

With great sadness, I wish to share news of the passing of one of our most esteemed colleagues, UC San Diego Professor Emeritus Helen M. Ranney, MD, whose distinguished career was noteworthy both for her groundbreaking contributions to the study of sickle cell anemia, and for the many historic “firsts” she achieved as a pioneering woman in medicine. Dr. Ranney passed away on Monday, April 5, in La Jolla, surrounded by family and friends. She would have been 90 on April 12.

A visitation will be held from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Friday, April 9, at the El Camino Mortuary, 5600 Carroll Canyon Road, San Diego. A Mass celebrating her life will be held at Mary Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Church at 11 a.m. on Saturday, April 10, followed by a reception at the UCSD Faculty Club. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to the UC Foundation /Helen M. Ranney Memorial Scholarship, 9500 Gilman Drive, San Diego, CA 92093-0853.

Dr. Ranney was recruited to the UC San Diego School of Medicine in 1973 as the first woman to chair a Department of Medicine. She was widely honored for her research in the field of blood disorders, which included the first description of the abnormal blood cell structure and genetic factors linked to sickle cell anemia, a disease that primarily affects African-Americans. She was awarded the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Medical Achievement Award in 1972 for this work. Her accomplishments as a scientist and physician paralleled her success as a female physician. Her career milestones included serving as the first woman president of the Association of American Physicians, and the first woman honored as a Distinguished Physician of the Veterans Administration. In addition to her election to the Institute of Medicine and National Academy of Sciences, she served as President of the American Society of Hematology, and she was a Master of the American College of Physicians. She was one of the individuals honored in a 2005 National Library of Medicine exhibition on influential women physicians, called “Changing the Face
of Medicine.”

Dr. Ranney was an outstanding physician-scientist, a leader in medicine, a respected mentor, and an influential figure in our history. UC San Diego School of Medicine today reflects her vision and leadership. Countless men and women, both students and colleagues, were inspired by her sharp intelligence, her curiosity, her passion for both clinical medicine and research, and her wry wit. Her legacy lives on in those she taught and influenced, and had an indelible influence on the shaping of UC San Diego’s academic medical center as a top-ranking research, patient care and educational institution.

Born in Cayuga County, New York, Dr. Ranney entered Barnard College with plans to study law, but decided to pursue medicine because, in her own words, “Medicine attempts to fix what it studies.” She attended Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons, one of only five women in a class of 120. After earning her MD in 1947, she remained on the Columbia faculty for nearly two decades, continuing her academic career in New York state until 1973, when she was recruited to the newly established UC San Diego School of Medicine.

“I came (to UC San Diego) because it looked as though it was going to be very interesting because of the very good people they had. My devotion has been to new things that were getting started, and there was a lot of building to be done,” she once reflected.

When she retired from her faculty position at UC San Diego in 1990, she remained active as a physician and scientist while serving as a board member, advisor and consultant to the Alliance Pharmaceutical Corporation, and working as an advocate for medically underserved populations.

She is survived by her nieces, Alesia Ranney-Marinelli, of Katonah, New York, and Patricia Ranney, of Ballston Lake, New York.

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