



## In Memoriam

Mary Frances Picciano, PhD, Senior Nutrition Research Scientist at the Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS), National Institutes of Health (NIH), died in August 2010 after a long illness. Her myriad contributions to nutrition research, teaching, community service, and nutrition policy did much to shape the field of maternal and child nutrition.

Picciano earned her MS and PhD degrees from the Pennsylvania State University. She rose from assistant (1974) to full professor (1984) in the College of Agriculture at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and also in its College of Medicine. In 1989, she moved to the Pennsylvania State University as professor of nutrition, where she was a gifted original researcher with an encyclopedic knowledge of nutrition who collaborated with dozens of investigators on projects covering the full range of human nutrition science from very basic studies through human clinical trials. Many of these collaborations extended for years and resulted in lasting friendships. She was especially known academically for her research on maternal, infant, and early childhood nutrition, particularly on the composition and physiology of human milk (1, 2). Folate and trace element metabolism were also longstanding active areas of research interest. She served as President of the International Society for Research in Human Milk and Lactation (ISRHML). She continued to lead a productive research group, with numerous publications on folate, trace elements, and other nutrient requirements in infancy and childhood, as well as on the composition of human milk (3), until she left academe in 2001. She authored >100 original research papers on the diets and nutrient requirements of pregnant women, infants, and children, co-authored the popular textbook *Human Nutrition* (4), and co-edited 2 other books. Her achievements were recognized by the Borden Award on human nutrition research in 1984, the Lederle Award for distinguished research in infant nutrition in 1987, the March of Dimes/Agnes Higgins Award of the American Public Health Association in 1999, and ISRHML's 2010 Macy-Gyorgy Award.

Picciano was also a committed, skilled teacher and mentor who relished opportunities to mentor graduate students and who was especially proud of their later careers. "I am continually impressed with the substantial weight that keen mentoring imparts on career choices and sustained professional achievement," she wrote. She not only imparted her scientific influence but was also a supportive, nurturing collaborator who was willing to go the extra mile to help young scientists.

Picciano joined the NIH ODS first in 1999 as a Visiting Scientist, and then permanently in 2001 as a Senior Nutrition Re-

search Scientist. At the ODS, she focused increasingly on nutrition policy in addition to research. She co-chaired a conference and co-edited a series of reports on Food and Dietary Supplement Databases for the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which described the gaps in dietary supplement database-related research (5). She followed up with collaborative efforts to update and strengthen reporting of dietary supplements in NHANES. Picciano also led conferences on dietary supplements in women (6) and published articles on estimates of the prevalence of dietary supplement use in adults and children in the United States (7, 8). She also continued to publish comprehensive reviews on folate (9) and

worked with others to find better ways to assess and monitor the health effects of folate and vitamin B-12 (10). Her contributions in developing nutrition policy on folate occupied much of her time. Increasingly after 2007 her concerns turned to vitamin D, especially as it became clear that current requirements needed to be reviewed and possibly updated. She directed the ODS Vitamin D Initiative, a comprehensive, multifaceted effort to synthesize available research on this nutrient, identify research needs and challenges, and evaluate their application to public health policy (11, 12). This work provided great benefit to federal efforts on vitamin D and is now the framework for other similar efforts within the ODS. In 2010, she received the NIH Director's Award "in recognition of exceptional leadership resulting in a broader understanding of vitamin D that will benefit the public health." She was an articulate and persistent advocate for bringing the best science to bear on nutrition policy development.

This commitment was remarkably effective and much appreciated by her colleagues. Among her other innovations was the creation of the Dietary Supplement Research Practicum, a 5-d annual course to provide fundamental scientific knowledge of dietary supplements to academicians and their advanced students.

In addition to her demanding work schedule, Picciano was extensively involved in professional societies, especially the American Society for Nutrition (ASN). She was on the editorial board of the *Journal of Nutrition* for many years and served as ASN's treasurer. She also served on many advisory boards, review panels, and editorial boards.

On a personal level, Mary Frances Picciano was an engaging and exhilarating companion who never lacked for conversation, and who was a loyal friend to many. She was deeply devoted to her husband, John Milner (Chief of the Nutrition



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1946–2010

Science Research Group in the National Cancer Institute), her children, and her extended family. The Picciano-Milner household entertained frequently, graciously, and exuberantly, with splendid cooking by the hostess, and spirited conversation by all.

In 2010, shortly before she died, she received the David Kritchevsky Career Achievement Award in Nutrition from the ASN "in recognition of an outstanding career in nutrition." The entire nutrition community mourns the loss of this dynamic and caring colleague. We treasure the opportunities we had to work and socialize with her and her husband and remember her as a shining star in our field.

Neither author had any conflicts of interest.

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doi: 10.3945/ajcn.110.010389.

