

Obituary: Elizabeth O'Hern



Elizabeth Moot O'Hern, 89, noted microbiologist, mycologist and writer on women scientists died on February 19, 2003, of colon cancer at the health center of the Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, MD.

Elizabeth ("Betty") Moot O'Hern was born in Richmondville, New York, and spent her early adult years as a grade school teacher in New York State. Dr. O'Hern, earned her bachelor and masters degrees from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1945 and 1947, respectively, and doctorate in microbiology from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1956. After receiving her doctorate she became an instructor at the Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, NY in

1957 until she and her husband moved to Washington, DC in 1962. Before joining NIH, Dr. O'Hern was an assistant professor of microbiology at the George Washington University Medical Center from 1962 to 1965, and principal investigator for anti-malarial drug research at Bionetics Research Laboratory in Kensington in 1965–67. Dr. O'Hern was a health scientist and program administrator at the National Institutes of Health's Institute of General Medical Sciences with increasing responsibilities from 1968 until her retirement in 1986. In 1983 she was a member of the People-to-People Microbiology Delegation to China.

She played an active role over two decades in the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) chairing its committee on status of women in microbiology and serving on its national nominating committee and archives committee. Dr. O'Hern was also a member of the board of directors of the Foundation on Microbiology. Among her honors was the ASM's prestigious Alice Evans Award for Exemplary Scholarship on Achievements of Women in Microbiology in 1986. She was an Elected Fellow to Sigma Delta Epsilon (Graduate Women in Science) where she served as president and secretary and also received their Meritorious Service Award. She was an emeritus member of the American Society for Cell Biology, the New York Medical Mycology Society (vice president, 1961–62), Mycological Society of America, the Medical Mycological Society of the Americas and was an Elected Fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology and the Washington Academy of Science. In 1990, she served as consultant to the University of California's tobacco-related grants department. Dr. O'Hern was also listed in several different Who's Who.

In addition to her many affiliations with microbiology, mycology and other scientific societies, she was an active member of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. Dr. O'Hern was past president of the Washington, DC branch of the American Association of University Women and served on the national nominating committee and its educational foundation board.

She was also president of the Washington, DC chapter of the Graduate Women in Science (Sigma Delta Epsilon), and was its national secretary and chair of its network and its nominating committees.

Her first book, *Profiles of Pioneer Women Scientists*, was published the year of her retirement after which she continued writing for professional journals on microbiology and about women scientists. She authored or co-authored over two dozen such articles, and also presented abstracts and other presentations to scientific conferences in this country and Latin America. Her second book about women in astronomy was

near completion at the time of her death, and may be published in the near future.

The O'Herns traveled widely focusing on France and more recently Latin America. Dr. O'Hern completed courses at six universities in France from 1978 to 1992. Survivors include her husband of fifty-one years, William J. O'Hern, resident at the Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, five nieces and nephews, and several grand-nieces and nephews.

W. J. "Jud" Long*

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