

Obituary

Elizabeth A. Young, M.D.



Dr. Elizabeth Young, Professor of Psychiatry and Senior Research Professor at the Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience Institute (MBNI) at the University of Michigan passed away on September 1, 2009 after a yearlong battle with leukemia. She was 59 years old.

Dr. Young was an internationally renowned biological psychiatrist who conducted seminal work on stress biology and its role in severe depression and other mood disorders. She was elected to the ACNP in 1996.

Elizabeth was raised in the Detroit and Chicago area, earned her medical degree from the Ohio State University in 1976, and completed her residency in Psychiatry at the same institution in 1979.

Elizabeth came to the University of Michigan Medical School in July 1979 as a research fellow in the Department of Psychiatry. In 1981 she received a postdoctoral fellowship to work in the laboratories of Drs. Huda Akil and Stanley Watson at the Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience Institute (MBNI). She went on to join the faculty of the MBNI and Psychiatry where she moved through the ranks to the senior positions she occupied at the time of her death.

Dr. Young was the quintessential translational physician scientist—a role she fashioned for herself before its critical importance was widely appreciated. Early in her career, she conducted fundamental research on the biology of endorphins and on the regulation of the hypothalamo-pituitary-adrenal axis by stress. Simultaneously, she undertook groundbreaking studies on the dysregulation of the stress system in major depression. Elizabeth posited that abnormal responsiveness to stress is not only a consequence of depression but may be part and parcel of the pathophysiology of mood disorders. She was fully aware of the intricacies of the stress system at the molecular, brain circuit, and neuroendocrine levels. Therefore, she realized that there were many points of vulnerability where the system could be disrupted, but also many approaches to resetting its intricate balance. It is because of these unique insights that she spent a significant portion of her career devising novel strategies to challenge the stress system and examine its responses in normal subjects and patients with mood disorders. She analyzed the stress disruption not only in severe depression but also in related and sometimes co-morbid illnesses, such as anxiety disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A particular focus of her research was understanding gender differences in mood disorders and uncovering the biological and psychosocial reasons for the increased vulnerability of women to depression and anxiety. Her body of work stands as one of the most systematic and mechanistic analyses of the biology of mood disorders in our field.

But Elizabeth was much more than a talented physician scientist. She was also a

loving wife and stepmother, a caring physician, a wonderful collaborator and mentor, an ardent gardener and appreciator of the best that life has to offer, and a devoted friend. During her ordeal, she and her equally remarkable husband, Dr. Peter Hinman, maintained a blog in which they shared their trials and their triumphs with their countless friends and colleagues. Their courage, love, thoughtfulness and generosity towards their friends were inspiring. In knowing her, those of us who love her learned not only how to live well, but also how to die well.

She is survived by her husband Dr. Peter Hinman, her step-daughter Dr. Mira Hinman and two step-granddaughters Annika and Celia McDermott-Hinman.

A ceremony to honor her memory is planned for early October and a Scientific Symposium in the Spring. A Memorial Fund has been created to establish **The Elizabeth A. Young Lectureship on Stress and Mood Disorders** at the University of Michigan. Donations to the Fund can be sent to MBNI, 205 Zina Pitcher Place, Ann Arbor, MI 48109. Att: R. Freedman.

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