

# Ruth McCorkle, Nursing

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DEATHS

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Ruth McCorkle

Margaret Ruth ("Ruth") McCorkle, professor emerita of nursing at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Nursing and a pioneer in cancer nursing, education and cancer-control research, died in her Connecticut home on August 17. She was 79.

Dr. McCorkle was born in Johnson City, Tennessee. Prior to entering the world of academia, she served in the US Air Force Nurse Corps, helping mortally wounded soldiers transition from battlefields in Vietnam. This experience led her to study at St. Christopher's Hospice in London and later to co-found the Hospice of Seattle and the Northwest Regional Oncology Society, culminating in the development of the Symptom Distress Scale and the Enforced Social Dependency Scale, both groundbreaking measures in psychosocial oncology.

She received a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Maryland and a master's in medical-surgical nursing from the University of Iowa. She earned her doctorate in mass communications from the University of Iowa.

Dr. McCorkle joined the faculty at Penn in 1986. In addition to teaching oncology nursing, she was director of Cancer Control at Penn's Cancer Comprehensive Center and director of the Nursing School's Center for Advancing Care in Serious Illness. She also held various leadership roles in the school, including director of the master's oncology program and chair of the adult health and illness division. She retired from Penn in 1998, earning emerita status at that time. She went on to take a position at Yale School of Nursing where, most recently, she was the Florence Schorske Wald Emerita Professor of Nursing, Professor of Epidemiology.

Her work also led to many firsts, including appointments as the first research chair of the Oncology Nursing Society and first non-medical scientist to be designated as a program director of a pre and postdoctoral training grant from the National Cancer Institute. She also served on the boards of the Oncology Nursing Society and the International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care. She was a member of numerous study sections of the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Nursing Research.

Dr. McCorkle was elected to the National Academy of Medicine in 1990, and she received numerous other honors, including Book of the Year Award for Cancer Nursing from the *American Journal of Nursing*, a Distinguished Merit Award from the International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care and a Distinguished Research Award from the Oncology Nursing Society. She was named the Nurse Scientist of the Year by the Council of Nurse Researchers of the American Nurses Association. In 2014, she was inducted to the Sigma Theta Tau International Hall of Fame, and in 2018 she was designated a Living Legend by the American Academy of Nursing. A prolific writer, her work appears in many professional journals in the US and abroad.

Dr. McCorkle was also well-known for humanizing the face of cancer care. According to Penn Nursing Dean Antonia Villarruel, "For those of us who knew her here at Penn, we also remember well her fun-loving and generous spirit as she was at the forefront of special events and activities, donning costumes at Halloween, decorating her office and being first in line to sign up for the Penn Nursing softball team. And, as part of the American Cancer Society Daffodil Days, an annual fundraiser, Dr. McCorkle would purchase yellow daffodils for every member of the School's staff and personally deliver them around the School!"

Dr. McCorkle is survived by six children; a granddaughter; one sister; three nieces; and countless protégés.