

*In Memoriam – Karen Seibert, PhD*



Washington University lost a talented colleague, passionate leader, and dear friend when Karen Seibert passed away at home on Tuesday November 9, 2020. Karen was 61 years young and touched so many lives in our community with her vibrance, enthusiasm, and generosity. Among the many beneficiaries of Karen’s passion and wisdom are the Cordell Institute and its directors. Karen was instrumental in the formation of the Cordell Institute and in bringing together the WU medical school and law school campuses in a no-nonsense manner that was so natural for her. She made important and foundational contributions to our institute and we will continue to rely on her inspiration going forward. As such, we want to share something of Karen with our fellows, supporters, and friends alike.

Dr. Karen Seibert was a highly successful pharmacology scientist, with achievements in both commercial and academic settings. At her core though, Karen was a humanitarian with deep commitments to her family, her church and her community. Her guidance and contributions to the Cordell Institute reflect this combination of Karen’s finest attributes. She was, of course, an enormous help to the Cordell Institute’s work on the clinical, legal, scientific, and scholarly aspects of health and human information policy. Yet Karen was even more passionate about our potential to positively affect the Washington University and St. Louis communities, solving issues of education and access to advanced healthcare and information technologies.

Reflecting her diverse training and career, Karen was a Professor with appointments in three Departments at the Washington University School of Medicine. She was also an Adjunct Professor of Pharmacology and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the St Louis College of Pharmacy, where she was most recently Executive Director for the Center for Clinical Pharmacology. Her career at Pfizer and more recently Washington University, is one of amazing competence, substance and success in bringing groups large and small together to accomplish amazing things, as eloquently detailed in her [WU Department of Anesthesiology obituary](#).

Karen came out of early retirement in 2011 to rejoin Washington University and direct a quasi-entrepreneurial clinical genomics laboratory, known as Genomics and Pathology Services (GPS), and quickly became involved in a leadership role at Siteman Cancer Center (Siteman) as Director of Shared Resources. Her organizational and communication skills were a tremendous help not only to GPS and Siteman, but to her more recent role in building the Phase One Unit at the Center for Clinical Pharmacology. In her leadership role there, Karen built a powerful new collaboration between these two longstanding and neighboring healthcare institutions that will serve as a model for collaborative drug discovery for generations to come. Identifying the projects and the talent needed to bring these and other visions to life was a challenge Karen was uniquely equipped to do. Karen's good friend and colleague Tim Eberlein, M.D.—Director of Siteman Cancer Center, Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Distinguished Professor, and Bixby Professor and Chairman of the Department of Surgery—described Karen as “an amazing person and a huge contributor for Siteman. In addition to her incredible contributions, she was a wonderful and loyal friend. Karen made all of us and everyone she worked with – better.” Dr. Eberlein and Siteman have honored Karen's contributions by renaming her position at the cancer center in perpetuity as the Karen Seibert Associate Director of Shared Resources, and in addition, established the Karen Seibert Lifetime Achievement award. The inaugural recipient of the Karen Seibert Lifetime Achievement award was, fittingly enough, Karen herself, and she was able to receive the award at her home shortly before her death.

It was through her friendship with Dr. Eberlein—a co-founder of the Cordell Institute alongside WashU Law Dean Nancy Staudt—that Karen became a strong advocate for the Institute, guiding many of the earliest conversations about what form a successful partnership between our schools of medicine and law might look like. She also guided and convinced us —its future directors—that this was a project worth investing in to bring our two schools on opposite sides of Forest Park closer together. Karen believed firmly in the Cordell Institute and its mission of pioneering an ethical data-driven future, promote health, and protect people... She was right. She often was. Karen was a keen and active observer of the human condition, literally and in the abstract. Through her amazing career she had worked with all kinds of brilliant, driven, and flawed human beings. Her experiences gave her a toughness and capacity for shrewd assessments, but also the deep empathy and compassion that were her hallmark. Having persevered through many challenges, including the cancer that ultimately claimed her life, Karen became more passionate about the inherent goodness in people. She challenged us all with her vision for better, more equitable healthcare—and that we will learn to genuinely care for each other in the process.

At the Cordell Institute, we will endeavor to rise to Karen's challenge.

-Jon Heusel and Neil Richards

Directors, Cordell Institute for Policy in Medicine & Law

Washington University in St. Louis