



YEAR OF AWARD: 2020

Margaret A. Shupnik

Gerald D. Aurbach Professor of Endocrinology; Professor of Medicine; Senior Associate Dean for Research, School of Medicine

Years of service at UVA:
1988-2021

Peggy Shupnik, the Gerald D. Auerbach Professor Emerita of Endocrinology, retired in April 2021 after a more than 30-year career at UVA. She wore several research hats since joining the faculty in 1988. From leading research breakthroughs in reproductive endocrinology to collaborating on

efforts such as the creation of the UVA Brain Institute, she expanded the roles of women in medicine and helped advance the University's research enterprise.

Shupnik, who also served as Senior Associate Dean for Research in the School of Medicine, worked with the Summer Research Internship Program, offered by the School of Medicine since 1992 to provide opportunities to racially and ethnically diverse students interested in medicine.

In spearheading the Brain Institute, established in 2016, Shupnik "assembled teams of neuroscientists

across schools to work together, with common aims and a spirit of collaboration, to prepare the institute's application," wrote the institute's director, Dr. Jaideep Kapur, Eugene Meyer III Professor of Neuroscience.

She oversaw the transition of UVA's General Clinical Research Center to the Clinical Research Unit in Fontaine Research Park, including the Ivy Foundation Translational Research Building located there. In addition, Shupnik worked with Pamela Norris, Executive Dean in the School of Engineering and Applied Science, to reinvigorate the School's NanoStar Institute.

Among other collaborative endeavors, she worked with Dr. Karen Johnston and others to establish the integrated Translational Health Research Institute of Virginia – known as iTHRIV – winning a five-year, \$23 million National Institutes of Health Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA).

WHY DID YOU COME TO UVA?

I was recruited into the Division of Endocrinology, and endocrinology was very hot in the molecular biology field then because this was all about how genes were regulated in the 1980s. So, Michael [Thorner, David C. Harrison Professor Emeritus of Internal Medicine] and Bob [Carey, Dean Emeritus of the medical school] really wanted to open up the science in the division of endocrinology, particularly in translational endocrinology and medicine.

I wasn't really very familiar with the University of Virginia at that time. I was coming from a very urban environment and a very large institution. I was at Mass General, Brigham and Women's, and the Howard Hughes Institute, working with literally thousands of faculty in medicine. I was struck that there were many schools in addition to Medicine, right here on Grounds, and that there was a chance to collaborate and actually make a real contribution because there was the immediacy of location.

WHAT WAS UVA LIKE WHEN YOU ARRIVED? HOW HAS IT CHANGED AND/OR STAYED THE SAME?

UVA has changed in many good ways, not only in size but also, I think, in looking outward. I think that UVA is more ready to and excited to do that. There's a lot more diversity in UVA than when I came, in every respect, which is awesome.

HOW DO YOU THINK DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF YOUR IDENTITY, INCLUDING BEING A WOMAN, IMPACTED HOW PEOPLE RESPONDED TO YOU IN YOUR POSITION?

I'm not sure that I can completely separate being a woman from all the other ways I was unusual. I was the second woman professor and then the first PhD professor in a clinical department. I had a discipline that was fairly new, so almost everything I did I was the first person to do – not just the first woman, but the first person.

I had more hurdles about being a woman at other points in my career than here because, by the time I came to UVA, I had a certain set of skills that were desired. Being a woman helped me a little bit to be both more collaborative and fearless. We had a common goal – to build up the endocrine division – and it became very prominent.

continued

In Her Words | Margaret A. Shupnik

WHAT SUPPORT(S) DID YOU HAVE? WHAT KEPT YOU GOING IN MOMENTS OF ADVERSITY?

I think that support changes over time, and I think, maybe that's one thing that we can all appreciate, having been through a pandemic, where suddenly we shut things down and we were able to find out what mattered in a more focused way. Certainly my family. I've been very close to both my parents, my sister, and my husband. I had a group of friends that I developed throughout my education, there were a few friendships that I developed at UVA, and I became very involved nationally in several scientific societies, so there were those ties.

As with any kind of mentoring, your social network and your support network are fluid. There are always people coming and going. When you have common goals with people, you become friendly with them. You may certainly keep those friendships, but they're not as close all the time.

I think it behooves us all to realize that we touch people in a lot of different ways, whether we know so or not. Just be aware of that possibility and that potential for positive action.

Learning who to trust is maybe the single most important issue we may have as human beings, no matter what our circumstances are. You learn that through trial and error. It's a little bit more difficult because if you are a leader, because you have to have some objectivity and you can't confide as much as if you weren't.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN IN A SIMILAR POSITION TODAY?

I think it can be more difficult for women to show weakness or perceived weaknesses. Have a few individuals whom you feel you can trust. Being false is never a good move. You might be silent, but never false.

I think sometimes women feel they have to have tough veneers, and that can lead them to really shut themselves out of potential friendships. That could result in some moves that are not all that helpful to them or to others. I don't think that men are immune from that either; but I think, certainly when I was coming through the ranks and speaking from my generation, this was a pressure women faced. There's lots of books now about what being twice as good and all of that kind of thing does to people, and it could it apply to any group that is not in the majority and not in the seats of power.

I had family responsibilities for my parents. When you're trying to balance other things and family, trusting yourself is really important. Don't take on things that you know would be too much for you because you're afraid to say no. On the other hand, don't sell yourself short or be afraid to do it because you feel you're not good enough for that.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED? WHAT LEGACY ARE YOU LEAVING THAT YOU ARE MOST PROUD OF?

I would hope to be remembered, and differently by different people. Certainly, I had an ability to shape and help the students, fellows, and people I've had within my laboratory in a very immediate way. And I hope they feel that way.

In some of the organizations I've been part of, I would like to be remembered as someone who was really looking out for the common good and trying to help people. In the research arena, I would like to feel the same thing. Some of the initiatives we worked to bring to UVA included the CTSA, the comprehensive Cancer Center, and the Brain Institute, were really far-reaching across Grounds and collaborative. I would like people to feel that I accomplished some of that and helped other people accomplish that. That would make me feel very happy because that's what I wanted to do.

One interesting thing happened because I was retiring during the time of pandemic. The School of Medicine had a big retirement celebration for me on Zoom. It was a surprise, and there were a couple hundred people on the call. Holding it on Zoom enabled them to reach out to a number of my students and fellows from all across the country and world. And they were just so sweet, in the things they said, and I was so touched. I thought that if we had the traditional retirement reception at the Colonnade Club, none of this would have happened, so that was actually just lovely.



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because you're afraid to say no. On the other hand, don't sell yourself short or be afraid to do something you feel passionate about because you feel you're not good enough to do it.

