

In Memoriam: Abby Lippman

By SHELDON KRIMSKY

One cannot encounter the prolific writings of Abby Lippman, who passed away unexpectedly after a fall on December 26, 2017 at age 78, without recognizing that she applied her analytical mind and her deep understanding of public health and medical policies in order to question institutional authority. Abby always showed us what we were missing in the road less traveled.

She questioned the widespread use of HPV vaccines until the benefits and risks were fully addressed. She warned against aggressive genetic screening that would eliminate all children with disabilities, who would otherwise make notable social contributions and provide immeasurable love to a family. She railed against making assisted reproduction, including egg donation, a commercial activity only available to those with means. And she opposed the use of induced pluripotent stem cells (IPS) to develop gametes, shortcutting human evolution with unknown consequences. Genetic reductionism (geneticization), she wrote, trivialized the complexity of disease and that medical and reproductive technologies were not intrinsically good.

Abby was born in Brooklyn in 1939. After attending Erasmus High School and Cornell University, she earned her doctorate in human genetics. She gained an appointment as professor in McGill's Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics

and Occupational Health. She spent half of her life living in Montreal as a naturalized Francophile and carried her penchant for social activism, cultivated in New York during the 1960s, to Canada and amplified throughout the world. The McGill Reporter wrote: "Abby Lippman was



a formidable presence in Montreal. When seen strolling down Sherbrooke Street, she was a force to be reckoned with."

As a professor of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health, Abby's unit of analysis was populations and social systems. Data mattered but so did ethics and social justice. She was widely sought after by patient and women's advocacy groups as an independent voice they

could trust. She was a core member and frequent contributor to Biojest, a list serve dedicated to public accountability and human rights in relation to the safety, evaluation, approval, and marketing of therapeutic products.

Abby served on the advisory committee of the Council for Responsible Genetics (CRG) and contributed policy statements and essays in *GeneWatch*. Stuart Newman, professor of cell biology and anatomy at New York Medical College who co-authored articles, position papers and letters with Abby, said: "As a member of the Advisory Board of CRG she was a principal formulator of its 1993 position paper against human germ-line modification, the first such statement by a secular public interest group."

Abby's writings included many letters to journals and newspapers, in response to stories that short-changed critical issues. Her *New York Times* letters addressed: the morality of cloning embryos; osteoporosis drug risks; creating embryos for research; breast cancer gene does not cause disease, and the patriarchal interpretations of pregnancy.

At a time in history when women's voices are shaking the foundations of patriarchy, Abby Lippman will be remembered for carrying the torch of feminist approaches to science and the reproductive rights of women.

