

# Nussenzweig Memorial Symposium: Celebrating a Life Dedicated to Malaria Research



The research community gathered on Wednesday, January 30, to celebrate the extraordinary scientific contributions of Ruth Nussenzweig, MD, PhD, to the parasitology field, particularly malaria research. Dr. Nussenzweig was a professor of microbiology and pathology at NYU School of Medicine since 1965, and was the first woman to serve as chair of the Department of Medical and

Molecular Parasitology. The memorial symposium was organized by the NYU Langone Health Departments of Pathology and Microbiology and partially supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation.

”The Departments of Pathology and Microbiology feel an obligation to honor Ruth’s legacy and inspire a new scientific generation to better know her story and follow her commitment,” said Eva Hernando-Monge, PhD, vice chair of the pathology department, in her opening remarks. Ana Rodriguez, PhD, professor in the department of microbiology, who worked with Dr. Nussenzweig for many years, also took the stage to speak about Dr. Nussenzweig’s legacy. “Ruth’s lifelong scientific goal was to discover a malaria vaccine that would save the lives of children in developing countries. Her research and accomplishments constitute the basis for the only licensed malaria vaccine to date, and for the most advanced candidate vaccine still in clinical trials,” she said.

The symposium included several scientific presentations on the progress and existing challenges towards eradication of malaria, featuring speakers Fidel

Zavala, MD, professor at Johns Hopkins University, friend and collaborator of Dr. Nussenzweig; Elizabeth Winzeler, PhD, professor at University of California San Diego; and Maria Mota, PhD, professor at *Instituto de Medicina Molecular* in Lisbon, Portugal. Symposium participants included Dr. Nussenzweig’s past mentees and colleagues, in addition to her three children and husband, prominent scientist Victor Nussenzweig, MD, PhD. “I had the great pleasure of meeting friends whom I love and had not seen for many years,” he said.



*Dr. Maria Mota presenting at the Nussenzweig Memorial Symposium.*

Dr. Nussenzweig’s legacy has inspired many members of our community, including Iannis Aifantis, PhD, professor and chair of the Department of Pathology. “Her focus, persistence, perseverance, willingness to mentor, and commitment to our institution were all exemplary. However, perhaps most importantly, Ruth was the first to break glass ceilings for women in science—not in this day and age, but half a century ago, as a young female immigrant,”

he shared.



*Celebrating Dr. Nussenzweig's legacy. Above, top from left, Dr. Eva M. Hernando-Monge, Dr. Ana Rodriguez, Dr. Iannis Aifantis, Dr. Elizabeth A. Weinzeler, Dr. Fidel Zavala, Dr. Maria Mota. Bottom from left, Nussenzweig family member, Dr. Andre Nussenzweig and Dr. Victor Nussenzweig.*

### **About Dr. Nussenzweig**

Dr. Nussenzweig was the recipient of many awards and was nominated member of many prestigious scientific organizations, including the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academy in 2006, and the National Academy of Science in 2013. She passed away last year at the age 89, devoting most of her scientific career to the development of a malaria vaccine.

### **About Malaria**

Malaria is caused by parasites transmitted by mosquitoes. Even in relatively mild cases, it can cause high fever, chills, flu-like symptoms, and severe anemia. These symptoms can be especially dangerous for pregnant women

and young children causing, in some cases, lifelong, intellectual disabilities and even death. Due to the fact that malaria is preventable and treatable, there is global commitment and research effort to eradicate this disease.

*This story was contributed by the Department of Pathology and the Office of Science and Research.*