

## Theresa Conway ~ 1/30/1954 - 1/31/2010

The Creighton University Osteoporosis Research Center (ORC) and the entire Creighton University community are deeply saddened by the recent loss of one of our beloved staff members. Theresa Conway, RN died unexpectedly earlier this year. We would like to reflect on her time at Creighton and her work, which touched so many of us.



Theresa worked in the Osteoporosis Research Center from 1995-2007. Her primary role was that of a clinical nurse project manager. In this role, she contacted and recruited subjects for various research projects. The Bone Mass Inheritance project (BMI) which Theresa directed was an organizational triumph. The purpose of this project was to identify and describe the genetic factors that determine body size, fat size, percent body fat, and percent lean body mass. Theresa identified and recruited potential participants who had a broad range of bone density scores. Theresa and her team were then responsible for tracking the brothers, sisters, and children of each participant. The number of families she and her team located was 653 and the number of family members totaled 4504.

Extensive analysis from the coded/non-identifiable data uncovered more than 20 different genes having some impact on low bone density or osteoporosis. These genes and their functions continue to be intensively studied by our department and other laboratories. This on-going analysis has thus far produced more than 50 research articles published in prestigious journals. The analysis continues with

more journal articles to come.

From this study, we learned that there is a connection between bone density and weight. This connection between body weight and bone density in the BMI participants made it possible to then examine the data further for genetic factors related to the causes of obesity. These findings are in turn being examined to determine ethnic differences in both obesity and bone density.

Finally, the BMI study has allowed us to identify the genetic background for the date of menarche, the onset of puberty, the date of menopause and genes that influence height.

Theresa's hard work and unrelenting pursuit of the extended kindred of each of the families was a fundamental reason this study was so successful. Now, because of the many research articles published from this project, numerous laboratories around the world are studying the mechanisms describing how the various genes can influence bone density and other anthropologic features of humans.

Another of Theresa's key roles in the ORC was database development. Theresa had a real passion for technology. She was responsible for developing our department's internal database of patients and subjects. This file has grown over time and has allowed us to continue to be one of the top recruiting centers in the country for osteoporosis-related research studies. She mastered computer software and organized programs so that the multiple sub-

units within our department could organize and share information electronically.

Although Theresa spent a majority of her time here in the Osteoporosis Research Center, she touched others in her journey at Creighton:

*I first met Theresa Conway when she was in the graduate nursing program here at Creighton in 2006. I had an idea for a community health project and so I enlisted the assistance of Theresa to help in this endeavor. I knew right away that she was perfect for the project which was to develop a school health report card for the Omaha Tribe. The Tribe had been collecting school health screening data for several years but did not have a way to track the student's school screening data over time.*

*Theresa was instrumental in designing the health report card and developed a database to be used for entering school health screening data. She spent countless hours in the development and initial data entry of school screening data. She provided training in the use of the database for members of the Omaha Tribe. The school health report card has been a success story for the Omaha Tribe; it provides a way for families to see their child's health data year to year and provides the community with information about the health status of their most precious resource—the children. The school health report card project has been presented at the international, national, and local level. Theresa Conway always had a “we can do it” spirit and loved what she did.*

Marlene (Marty) Wilken, RN, PhD  
Creighton University School of Nursing

*I met Theresa in one of her first positions at Creighton, which was in cancer research under the medical direction of Dr. Henry Lynch. It was in this research that she honed her skills*

*in managing family studies. She and other members of the research team traveled extensively to collect specimens for genetic breast cancer research. The work on this research team has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge regarding breast cancer genetics.*

Jen Cavalieri, BSN, RN, CCRC  
University of Nebraska, Omaha

*Theresa joined the Clinical Research Office in March of 2007 as a Clinical Research Nurse. Theresa's extensive knowledge in the research field lead her to offer her expertise to faculty research investigators in need of coordinator support. She leveraged her experience to provide training and education to new study coordinators and faculty.*

David Cloutier,  
Director Clinical Research Office  
Creighton University Medical Center

*The Creighton University Staff Advisory Council serves as an advocate for University staff members (classification E-M staff positions). The Council is committed to fairness, justice and respect in a quality work environment in accordance with the Mission of Creighton University. Theresa was elected to serve for a 3-year term (2007-2009) on this committee by her peers. She worked with her fellow SAC members to advise the university president in matters affecting the general welfare and working conditions of all members of the university staff.*

Jennifer Larsen, RT(R)(BD)(ARRT), CDT  
Creighton University Osteoporosis Research Center

Theresa Conway was a remarkable woman. She was a wife, a mother, a nurse, a researcher and with all her knowledge, she took the opportunity to share with all those around her. She was a unique member of the Creighton community and she will be greatly missed. On behalf of the Osteoporosis Research Center, we offer our condolences to the Conway family.

# Opportunities to Participate

*The Creighton University Osteoporosis Research Center is conducting the following studies. If you have any questions, please call 402.280.BONE (2663) or Toll-free 800.368.5097.*

## RESEARCH STUDY FOR 13 AND 14 YEAR OLD GIRLS

This is a one year research study at the Osteoporosis Research Center evaluating the role of dairy consumption on weight management.

Requirements:

- 5 visits
- Painless evaluations
- Monetary stipend

Please contact our nurses at **402.280.4070** for more information.

## HEALTHY KIDS CAN HELP

The Osteoporosis Research Center is currently conducting an important study of bone health in growing children and adolescents.

Your child may qualify if he/she is between the ages of 5 through 18 years.

This study includes:

- One time visit
- Monetary stipend

Please contact our nurses at **402.280.4070** for more information.

## ARE YOU DIABETIC?

The Osteoporosis Research Center is currently conducting a study to determine the effects of diabetes on bone health. Both men & women are eligible for this study. To qualify for participation:

- Must be a type 1 diabetic for at least 3 years.
- Must be between 19 and 50 years of age.
- 3 visits to our center
- 1st visit involves a blood draw and bone density scans.
- Monetary compensation for study visits

## HAVE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW EXPERIENCED A BROKEN BONE?

### IT COULD BE OSTEOPOROSIS!

The Osteoporosis Research Center is currently conducting a research study investigating the underlying causes of osteoporosis in postmenopausal women.

Do you meet the following criteria?

- Age 45-70
- At least four years since last menstrual period
- Not currently on treatment for osteoporosis

## WOMEN SMOKERS NEEDED

The Osteoporosis Research Center is currently conducting a genetic study to determine the effect of smoking on bone health. This study involves no medication and is not a stop smoking study. If you qualify you will receive a stipend and bone density test at no cost to you. This study involves one visit to our center.

We are looking for:

- Caucasian women
- Age 30-40

## RESEARCH STUDY FOR WOMEN OVER THE AGE OF 65

The Creighton University Osteoporosis Research Center is currently conducting a study to test whether an investigational drug, given by injection, safely increases the bone mass of the hip when given in addition to the usual care for osteoporosis.

Do you meet the following criteria?

- At least 65-85 years old and postmenopausal
- Have never received osteoporosis treatment or have never taken a bisphosphonate (such as Actonel®, Fosamax®, or Boniva®) for the past 1-5 years.

Study staff will review additional study criteria with you at the clinic to determine if you are eligible. Study participation lasts 3 years, and volunteers can expect 10 visits to the study doctor for medical evaluations, which include regular bone density tests.

# Statement by *National Osteoporosis Foundation* Regarding the Use of Bisphosphonates

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 11, 2010) — As the nation's leading voluntary health organization solely dedicated to osteoporosis and bone health, the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) is committed to providing a breadth of information and resources on a range of issues from lifestyle behaviors to treatment options to help patients and health professionals throughout the country make informed decisions about bone health and osteoporosis. Because of that commitment, NOF offers the following statement on the recent news coverage of bisphosphonate medicines.

NOF recognizes that certain serious conditions associated with bisphosphonate medicines may cause concern for people taking these medicines. There have been reports of atrial fibrillation, osteonecrosis of the jaw (ONJ), severe pain and unusual broken bones in the thigh bone. While these conditions are serious, the number of people with them remains extremely small compared to the number of people who have taken these medicines. It is not really known whether the medications are even causing these problems, in part because the problems are so rare.

Based on information that is currently available, NOF believes that for most people taking bisphosphonate medicines, the benefits outweigh the risks of these unusual but serious conditions that appear to be associated with them. These medicines play an important role in stopping bone loss and preventing broken bones. Osteoporosis causes broken bones that result in significant pain, disability and loss of independence. Half of all women and up to one in four men over the age of 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis. More than 20 percent of patients age 50 and older who break a hip die within one year. Many others never fully recover.

Research studies clearly show that people taking a medicine to treat osteoporosis reduce their chance of breaking a bone. Studies have found that bisphosphonates reduce the risk of a broken hip in people with osteoporosis by as much as 40 to 50 percent. These medicines also reduce the risk of other broken bones. Patients for whom bisphosphonates are appropriate would be at higher risk of breaking a bone without treatment.

All medicines have possible benefits and risks. It is the position of NOF that bisphosphonates are highly effective in the right patients and that patients should not discontinue use of these medicines without speaking to their healthcare professional. Patients should talk to their healthcare professional if they develop new pain or have any concerns with their medications. If you have osteoporosis or an increased chance of breaking a bone, always talk with your doctor or other healthcare provider about the treatment choices available to you.

## Reviewing Your Treatment Plan

If you are taking an osteoporosis medicine, it is important that you review your treatment plan every year with your doctor or other healthcare provider. If you have been taking an osteoporosis medicine for five years, discuss the benefits of continuing it.

People who are not at high risk of breaking a bone may be able to take a “drug holiday” after five years of treatment with bisphosphonates. This means that you stop taking your osteoporosis medicine (bisphosphonate) but continue to see your healthcare provider to monitor your bone health, and look forward to restarting it at some point in the future. This does not apply to other medicines given for osteoporosis.

If you are at high risk of breaking a bone, then you may benefit by staying on an osteoporosis medicine. Other people may benefit from switching to a different medicine. Your healthcare provider is the best person to guide you about whether you should start, continue, switch or stop an osteoporosis medicine. Again, it is always important to look at both the benefits and risks of taking a medicine.

To view the entire press release from the NOF, visit their website at [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org).

## Statement by Robert R. Recker, MD, Director of the ORC

The news media have recently broadcast alarming reports that treatment with bisphosphonates can cause serious mid-shaft fractures of the femur (thigh bone). The following are in the class of drugs called bisphosphonates: alendronate (Fosamax) (Boniva, Actonel and Reclast). These news media reports have been misleading and overly alarming. We have studied this problem for several years and have found that; 1) these fractures are exceedingly rare, 2) they also occur rarely in the general population not on bisphosphonate treatment, and 3) that they represent a defect in bone metabolism, or bone remodeling, that existed prior to the treatment with a bisphosphonate. Thus, bisphosphonate treatment is not the cause of the problem. Of course, the bisphosphonates will not benefit an individual with this problem but we have no way of detecting that it is present prior to starting a bisphosphonate. We would like to calm the fears of our patients who are being treated with a bisphosphonate. Discontinuing bisphosphonate treatment results in a very much greater risk of fracture of any bone, including the femur, compared to continuing treatment. Therefore, I encourage people to continue their bisphosphonate treatment for osteoporosis, and to talk with their physician if they have fears about this.

Dear Friends,

Your donations to the Sister Anne Evers Endowment are truly appreciated. Not only will these funds help us train new leaders for health care and research advances as they go out into the world, they also enable us to help young investigators and researchers become established here in the Osteoporosis Research Center.

They provide resources for exploratory research that serves as the foundation for generating additional funds as well as help us continue laboratory and clinical research efforts that have already identified new approaches and treatments for the crippling disease of osteoporosis.

Your gift can mean so much.

Sincerely,

Susan Recker  
Coordinator of Development  
Osteoporosis Research Center Endowment

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*Cecilia Heine from Dr. & Mrs. Robert Recker*

IN CELEBRATION OF

*To celebrate 5 years post breast cancer. . .*

*Pam J. Ratigan*



## THE GIFT OF GIVING

*Consider a donation in honor of a loved one to the Osteoporosis Research Center*

Just mail this form to:

Sister Anne Evers Endowed Research Fund  
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601 North 30<sup>th</sup> Suite 4820  
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Osteoporosis Research Center

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Phone: 402.280.4470 Fax: 402.280.5173 Website: [osteoporosis.creighton.edu](http://osteoporosis.creighton.edu) e-mail address: [orc@creighton.edu](mailto:orc@creighton.edu)

## **Theresa Conway Memorial Fund**

In honor of her dedication and work a **Theresa Conway Memorial Fund** has been established at the Creighton Federal Credit Union. The donations will go to the Youth Diabetes Prevention Program of the Omaha Tribe in Macy, NE. Theresa championed the School Health Report Card, which has become a successful tool used to provide information to families about their child's health status and diabetes prevention.

Donations in memory of Theresa can be made at any Creighton Federal Credit Union location. For current members, transfers can be done over the phone or at any branch.

Checks should be made out to: Theresa Conway Memorial Fund  
and mailed to:

Creighton Federal Credit Union  
2575 Dodge St,  
Omaha, NE, 68131