

In Memoriam:

Laura Gerak, Ph.D.

Pediatric Psychologist in Palliative Care and Hematology-Oncology

June 19, 1963 – July 30, 2023



Dr. Laura Gerak, Pediatric Psychologist at Akron Children's Hospital passed away on July 30th, 2023, after a courageous battle with leukemia. Dr. Gerak joined Akron Children's Hospital from Kaiser Permanente as a clinical psychologist in 1999. She came to Akron as a provider with extensive knowledge in the clinical care of children with a range of behavioral and mental health conditions. Prior to her time at Akron Children's Hospital, she had not worked in the field of pediatric psychology, and thus, Dr. Gerak was *transformed* into a pediatric psychologist due to love of patients often facing their own mortality in both the palliative care and hematology-oncology divisions. In these experiences, Laura became a

leader. She was the primary supervisor to an entire generation of pediatric psychologists, teaching them both the science and the artistry of psychology.

Dr. Gerak was raised in Stow, Ohio and was a graduate of Stow High School and The University of Akron. She earned her master's degree in clinical psychology from Yeshiva University and her doctorate from the University of Toledo. She was a member of the Society of Pediatric Psychology, the American Psychological Oncology Society, and the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Care. In her most recent years, she became the Director of Psychology services at Akron Children's Hospital, being the voice and the seat at the table advocating for the psychological needs of children in the medical system. Within her clinical roles, Dr. Gerak led annual retreats for both Palliative Care and Hematology-Oncology for over 15 years. She was the facilitator for the Reflective Practice and Leadership series, a monthly safe space for fellows to explore issues of emerging leadership, conflict management, and engaging with difficult emotions and transitions, as well as the leader of Schwartz Rounds, a space to support healthcare staff to re-connect with their values through peer reflection after challenging professional and personal experiences. Her quiet, thoughtful and supportive approach to leadership, both at Akron Children's Hospital and in the field of Pediatric Psychology will have a lasting impact on those that worked with her.

She will be remembered for her generous spirit, selfless heart, and her love of giving gifts. She had unwavering devotion to her faith, family, and friends. She thought of her beloved nieces, nephews, and patients as her own children, and treated her friends and colleagues like family. Laura was a friend to her psychologists, her colleagues and those that were lucky enough to call her a friend, and even luckier enough to call her family. She will be so very missed by the pediatric psychologists impacted by her incredible legacy.

Katrina D. Hermetet, PhD, NCSP and Georgette Constantinou, PhD
Akron Children's Hospital