

Memorial to Jeff A. Sloan

By Andrew Bottomley, Cynthia Chauhan, Amylou Dueck, & Mirjam Sprangers

Work life, by Mirjam Sprangers

Jeff Sloan passed away at the age of 62 on May 1, 2022, due to cancer.

Jeff was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He was trained as a mathematical statistician, obtaining his doctorate degree from the University of Manitoba, Canada in 1991. He held a number of subsequent jobs, including an Adjunct Professorship at the Faculty of Nursing of the University of Manitoba. He was then offered a position at the Mayo Clinic, Rochester Minnesota, US. He was later appointed Professor of Biostatistics and Professor of Oncology at the Mayo Clinic. He had more than 30 years of experience as a clinical trials statistical consultant and researcher and was a key leader of the Cancer Control Program at Mayo. He had a very successful research career and was an international leader in incorporating quality-of-life measures in oncological research and clinical practice. He conducted pioneering research on interpreting quality-of-life results as clinically significant and showing the validity of simple single item measures. This work led to the routine administration of quality-of-life measures for every cancer patient visiting the Mayo Clinic. He was the first to investigate the genetic underpinnings of quality of life. Jeff was a life-long proponent of quality of life and a long-term member of ISOQOL. The scientific community has lost an innovative, productive, colorful, and kind colleague. He will be greatly missed.

A homage to Jeff Sloan, by Cynthia Chauhan

Jeff Sloan was a dear friend and an extraordinary professional with a generous heart and an active understanding of the importance of working together for the betterment of humanity. I say active understanding because Jeff implemented what others often only talk about. One way he did that was by reaching out to patients to include us in developing and running clinical trials. Jeff's humble attitude allowed him to treat patients as professional equals. He was also a very funny, delightful person, with whom one could always literally enjoy life. We worked together but we also laughed and played together and often the three overlapped each other in joyful ways. Apart from working together in quality of life research, Jeff and I shared a passion for chinchillas. His little chinchilla, Freya, brought Jeff so much joy. Jeff's other abiding passion was his wife, Vesna, and his children on whom his existence centered. Jeff had a beautiful ability to be thoroughly present to whomever was with him. He loved life and he loved people, approaching both with warmth, humor, and acceptance. Knowing Jeff and being his friend made me a better person. I think he did that for everyone whose life he touched. I miss him.

Jeff Sloan – The Statistics, by Amylou Dueck

Powerpoint presentation by Amylou Dueck held at the SISAQOL Conference in Madrid, 2022
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SISAQOL stands for Setting International Standards in Analysing Patient-Reported Outcomes and Quality of Life Endpoints

In memory of Jeff Sloan, by Andrew Bottomley

I lost a friend, and we all lost a star in the quality-of-life field. It was over 22 years ago when I first met this tall looming figure walking past me at ASCO in Chicago. I remember thinking “that’s Jeff Sloan!” We had just recently jostled by letter over an article and its interpretation. We debated that issue in a nice way despite never having met before, like academics do. We did not have email back then so you can imagine how that went! But at the time, I thought, surely I was right – that must be Jeff Sloan!

It was not for a couple of years later when we met again at the international quality-of-life research conferences. There, we both forgot about our letters and debates and we simply started chatting. Jeff said “Congratulations Dr. Bottomley on your Lancet Oncology paper! I am Jeff Sloan”, and from that day on we got on like a house on fire. Jeff was a statistician, and I am always one to joke and say, “those ‘statisticians’ are so brilliant and gifted with numbers that they may be challenged by talking to mere mortals like me”. But Jeff was different. He never took himself seriously and was always joking and making light of things. He was a brilliant orator. His relaxed way always put mere mortals like me at ease, allowing people to learn about quality of life in a relaxed manner.

Over the years, I always took joy from inviting Jeff to come and present at the EORTC QOL and Clinical Trials Conferences. He was a regular feature, and he was always certain to win everyone over and would even sometimes put on a show. One day before one of our conferences, during the faculty dinner at a posh restaurant, he arrived dressed in a shabby shiny track suit. I teased him and said “Jeff, you don’t dress like this for a faculty dinner in a fancy restaurant, you look like a rapper!” He explained that although the story was that the airport had lost his luggage, actually he was comfortable in his track suit. “You cannot feel comfortable like that!” I Joked. “And if you do, I dare you to present tomorrow to the 400 people at our conference dressed like a rapper in your shiny track suit”. His response was that he never refused a bet. The next morning, he turned up in a formal suit and said his luggage arrived. I felt the matter had ended, but I was mistaken. As the audience took their seat, I, as conference chair made a grand introduction of Professor Jeff Sloan, and he stood up and came to the podium. He then told the audience about our bet, and right in front of 400 people, he took off his suit to reveal underneath not a naked Jeff, but a Jeff in a horrible shiny track suit! The audience and faculty were laughing so hard, many of them were in tears! He then presented a brilliant talk! That was Jeff - a real star.

I have so many funny and interesting stories to share to keep me happy in the dark hours. Jeff and I were always in touch. I called him one day, before he started his cancer therapy and he said “call me whenever you can, it always brings a smile to my face to see it’s a Belgium number and it’s always great to talk”. While Jeff was undergoing his cancer treatment, we talked a few times over the following months. We had big plans. We planned to write a book on his cancer experience. With Jeff being a cancer survivor, a QoL expert and a world-leading statistician, it would be a total winner for a future book prize – at least that’s what I thought! But unfortunately, things didn’t go according to plan. Jeff’s passing is a big loss to so many. He touched the hearts of so many in the cancer field, and led so many PRO efforts. Jeff was lucky to have a wonderful family, and was a true family man. I wish his wife Vesna and his children all the best in these difficult times. Our thoughts are with you all, and we all miss Jeff for a long time to come.

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EORTC is European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer.

Tribute to Jeff Sloan, by Mirjam Sprangers

At one of the early ISOQOL conferences, I recall a tall man with the face of a Greek God who gave an inspiring and engaging presentation, expressing complex ideas transparently and making use of unconventional cartoons and jokes to get his message across. I found him awesome.

Later, in 2000, I received an invitation from Jeff to be part in a “consensus think-tank meeting on assessing clinical significance for quality-of-life measurement in oncology”, labeled Clinsig in short. I was made team leader of one of the six teams. When I saw the names of the other participants, I could not believe the invitation was serious. These were the hotshots of the field and I did not feel I belonged to that group. Later Jeff confessed that he could not believe they all came and wanted to participate either. Clinsig was the start of a great and enjoyable collaboration and learning experience. Again, I was in awe, this time of how Jeff was able to unite a diverse group of strongly minded people towards a common goal. The Clinsig group was highly successful and produced a series of seminal papers. I was impressed how well he had organized the group and the meetings at the Mayo Clinic. I have used that experience in my subsequent professional life. I was particularly impressed how he had an eye for the social aspects of such meetings. His adage was ‘Work hard, but play harder’. The dinner with actors at one of the Mayo residences and the barn dance were surely the highlights and remembered by the participants to date.

A couple of years later, I was impressed by an article he wrote about the genetic underpinning of quality of life; it was so visionary and interesting. I figured that if we wanted to move this field forward, we would need an international interdisciplinary group of people including experts in molecular and behavioral genetics. Jeff appeared to be open and interested in this idea and as a result we formed an international, interdisciplinary group we labeled the GeneQoL Consortium. This was the start of a new and stimulating adventure.

In 2008, I came over to Rochester for three weeks to help establishing the consortium and planning a first meeting. I was very excited. Jeff and his wife, Vesna, were so welcoming,

putting baskets of drinks and foods in my hotel suite, welcoming me with flowers in the office and organizing barbecues in their garden. Unfortunately, Jeff got his first heart attack in the middle of that visit. We were all in shock, but he was in the best of medical hands and recovered. When we held the first GeneQol meeting at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester in February 2009, we copied the format used for Clinsig: a public day with presentations open for anyone interested and two closed days where previously formed teams presented and discussed their work in plenary. In December of the same year, Jeff was awarded the Spinoza Chair 2009 by the Amsterdam Medical Center of the University of Amsterdam. He came over, gave an inspiring plenary lecture, a stimulating master class with my PhD students and post-docs, and co-hosted the second meeting of GeneQol. In the subsequent years, GeneQol was productive and successful. Jeff's leadership was indispensable, and we gratefully used his gift to bring the message across, in writing as well as in presenting orally.

Unfortunately, Jeff kept struggling with his health. Over the years I have been dead worried about him and was always glad when I got an email or was able to hear from his own voice that things got better.

I have fond memories of our encounters, the many conversations we have had, at ISOQOL conferences, at home or on the phone. Jeff was a real friend: warm, reliable, and supportive. I have experienced him above all as a sweet person. He really cared for people and seemed to suffer when they suffered. He was respectful of others' points of view and never spoke ill of other people. He was capable of seeing the likeable characteristics in others and making people shine. I think that quality made him so amiable.

Jeff also puzzled me as he seemed to embody a number of contrasts. I was intrigued by his pushing the social boundaries (his flamboyant Micky Mouse ties, his cartoons and jokes at conferences) meanwhile being very strict in adhering to the more fundamental, conventional mores. Whereas he was welcoming, gregarious, interested and kind, he seemed to hide at the boundaries of the groups he formed when no professional role was needed and in general was reluctant to talk about himself. I therefore considered him a jovial introvert.

I guess the only person he always felt comfortable with and preferred above anyone else was his high school sweetheart and life-long love, Vesna. Jeff was a family man and nothing could give him more pleasure than being with his wife and children Elizabeth, Marilyn and Alan. His family was no doubt the best recipient of his abundance of love.

I am indebted to Jeff for his influence on my thinking and skills and cherish the many fond memories, including his larger-than-life presence, his insightful comments, his creativity, his jokes, his acts of kindness, and sweet nature.