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Alumna Profile: Empowering Women in Science

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Empowering Women in Science



In her violence and injury prevention advocacy, Linda Degutis has worked with public health colleagues globally.

Linda Degutis (CSH '75), PhD, is generously funding the William J. Degutis Women in Science and Health Lecture Endowment, named for her late father, who helped inspire her prolific career in health sciences.

What is the goal of the lecture series?

Highlighting the success women are having in science careers. The speakers will be nationally known in their fields, from astrophysics to marine biology. We want to encourage students to pursue science careers and make them aware of opportunities they may not have considered.

Was science an early interest for you?

When I was a kid, I was always doing science experiments at home like growing algae in the basement—much to my mother's dismay.

Were your parents happier about your studies in college?

I was the first in my family to go to college. I earned a BS with a major in nursing at DePaul in 1975. My dad worked for Ford Motor Company in the aircraft engine division after serving in the Army Air Corps in World War II, then as a field engineer for the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration in the Great Lakes region. He encouraged my interest in science.

What was your first job?

I worked in the high-risk obstetrics and gynecology floor and emergency room at Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's in Chicago.

How did you end up at Yale University?

I moved out to Connecticut in '78 to work in the ER at Yale New

Haven Hospital. I got my master's at Yale in 1982 as a clinical specialist, then worked with a surgeon in trauma and intensive care for the medical school. We taught residents and students and set up the trauma care structure at the hospital. After I got my doctorate in epidemiology in 1994, I had faculty appointments in emergency medicine and trauma, public health and nursing until 2010.

And at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention?

I was the director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the CDC until 2014. I was there at the time of the Sandy Hook Elementary School killings and other events raising issues about violence and guns.

You've done work for the Avielle Foundation, named for a child killed at Sandy Hook, that funds neuroscience research.

I was their chief science officer for four years. We looked at the relationship between brain and mental health and violence, and ways to decrease violence in community settings. It was a fascinating, but obviously not easy, place to be.

What have you been doing more recently?

I started a think-tank program, Defense Health Horizons, at the federal government's Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., to help improve the military health system. We worked on women's reproductive health, a big transition for the military with more women being deployed. I'm also on a committee formed by the National Academy of Medicine and American Public Health Association that produces [free webinars](#) with scientific experts on various aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic.