On December 27, 2019, the social marketing and public health community lost a trailblazing leader, patient teacher, and dear friend. Susan D. Kirby, Dr.PH, MPH, associate editor of Social Marketing Quarterly (SMQ), was tireless in her work to improve the health and lives of countless people through the projects she generously contributed to as well as the thousands of social marketers she mentored, taught, and encouraged.

Dr. Kirby was a devoted social marketer whose remarkable career started in the private sector, allowing her to leverage her experience in business marketing and telecommunications to advance health communication. At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Susan served the agency for over 28 years, first as an employee and later as a consultant, working on almost every public health topic addressed by the agency. Most notably, Susan led the development of the CDC’s first brand tagline, “Safer. Healthier. People.” coupled with an updated logomark. She also co-led the development of CDC’s influential health communication curriculum, CDCynergy.

Susan also worked with many national, state, and local agencies on health promotion efforts, including the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, National Cancer Institute, and National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, among others. The state and local agencies Susan worked for included California’s Violence Prevention Unit, First 5 LA, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and Health Literacy Missouri. Individually and teaming with some of the top health marketing agencies in the country, Susan contributed to all aspects of countless social marketing and communication campaigns spanning topics including HIV, health care–associated infections, youth dating violence, and physical activity.

As an academic and educator, Susan endlessly encouraged newcomers to social marketing, from students to professionals. She taught social marketing courses for Emory University, University of California Los Angeles, University of Southern Florida, and CDC University. In her role as an adjunct

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associate professor at UCLA’s Department of Community Health Sciences, she took a problem-based learning approach, uniquely combining theory and practice to the great benefit of her students, as evidenced in countless student testimonials.

Dr. Kirby really put effort in helping the class understand the subject. I appreciate how much she cared. She listened and was open to the class feedback. I can truly say I understand social marketing after this class.

I am thankful we had Dr. Kirby as our teacher because she is a caring and approachable teacher who gave us detailed and helpful feedback.

Susan was committed to advancing the science of health communication and social marketing through the rigorous application of health behavior theory and marketing principles. To apply her passion most effectively across a range of public health topics and settings, Susan founded Kirby Marketing Solutions. Underlying Susan’s work were core values of diversity and inclusion, and a commitment to developing practical, strategic solutions to challenging health issues. With her solutions-oriented mind-set, no problem was ever too big or too small for her to solve. She was most proud of her work in bringing together diverse people from varying backgrounds, including the private sector, to help public health organizations achieve their goals.

As the associate editor of *SMQ*, Susan was a passionate advocate for practitioners. In her first editorial, she urged them to submit their work to *SMQ* to contribute their knowledge to the lasting collection of published literature in the field. Publishing, she said, would share new valuable insights with other social marketing professionals; validate their programs and persuade leadership to invest in social marketing; and inform future research to help the field grow. With this encouragement, Susan provided exhaustive support to new authors taking their first step into the publishing world, boosting their confidence that their investment in sharing would yield valuable insights for others.

Beyond her professional achievements, Susan will be remembered for her trademark humor and as a warm, true friend to many. She is survived by her beloved husband, a brother and sister and their children, who she embraced with the special attention she brought to the world. Susan will be deeply missed by family, friends, and her colleagues in public health, health communication, and social marketing.

**Remembrances From Susan’s Family, Friends, Colleagues, and Students to Celebrate Susan’s Life**

She dedicated her whole life to making this a better world both for the masses and for the individuals she touched. She came from humble beginnings and she lifted herself up through education and a genuine sense of caring to become a giant in her chosen field: the marketing of public health. It is often said life’s greatest calling is helping others. If that is true, you were a great success. The world is so much better a place because of all you did. (Marco Fuentes, Susan’s Husband)

Susan was a practitioner, an academic, an editor, but most importantly, a passionate social marketing and *Social Marketing Quarterly* advocate. I met Susan the first time at a social marketing conference way back in 1998, when I was a master’s student at Wisconsin and Susan was at CDC. Fast forward to 2017 and we started working closely as the editorial team of *SMQ*. We were a great team at *SMQ*, with her much needed practitioner perspective balancing my academic parochialism. I will greatly miss her as a friend and colleague. (Sameer Deshpande, *SMQ* Editor)

Susan embodied the core values of social marketing, putting scholarship into practice. Jim and I will miss her deeply, as will the field. (Carol Bryant and Jim Lindenberger)
I will always think of Susan breaking glass ceilings and walls, sometimes with her laugh! She would recount being treated like “some dumb southern blond” and having to work so hard against that stereotype. As a friend, she was quiet and considerate, often working behind the scenes to make things better. She taught at CDC, Emory University, UCLA and lastly at USF. There, she also advised on the creation of a brand strategy for an Ecuadorian chocolate that will be sold by USF to support public health students as well as families in Ecuador. She was the go-to person for on-point advice in social marketing, and just about anything. (Claudia Parvanta, University of South Florida)

I am proud to have introduced Susan to CDC back in the mid-90s when she was an assistant professor at Emory University in Atlanta. She soon thereafter joined the agency full-time, and through her collaboration with various CDC programs pioneered the application of social marketing principles within many public health areas. Susan is owed great appreciation for her constant enthusiasm and efforts in the field throughout the years and will be sorely missed. (Fred Fridinger, CDC)

I will deeply miss Susan. I always thought of her as my coach. She cheered me on, didn’t hesitate to nudge my direction when needed, and was a real cheerleader for our social marketing team. (Nancy R. Lee, Social Marketing Services, Inc.)

Susan Kirby was a consultant to CDC when she helped build the foundation for health communication at the agency. She later joined the new Office of Communication and one of her many contributions was leadership of a branding project which unified the many divisions within the organization and capitalized on its credibility. Susan had that rare combination of talents—strong strategic thinking with a creative spark. (Vicki Freimuth, CDC [retired])

Susan worked hard to integrate new materials and methods into the Social Marketing and Health Promotion class that she taught annually at UCLA, including audience research and outreach techniques that included online, digital, and social media methods. Given her skills and commitment to the field and our program, it is no wonder that Susan received excellent evaluations and positive student comments. Susan will be truly missed here at UCLA as her teaching reflects real world practice integrated with research and theory, which benefits our masters students. (Deborah Glik, UCLA Fielding School of Public Health)

Susan was a dear friend and a wonderful colleague! I first met her 22 years ago through the old social marketing listserv. I was so impressed with Susan’s willingness to share her knowledge and resources with this newbie! That willingness to share and to mentor is something that exemplified her. As we had more opportunities to interact, being colleagues became being friends. Susan was SO warm and engaging and supportive, and she had a delightful sense of humor. Anytime we had the opportunity to chat or visit, it was always like just picking up from the day before. Many people and communities have benefited from the work Susan did, and many of us have benefited from being her colleagues and friends! (Mike Newton-Ward)

Susan never let others limit her work and, through her mentorship, taught young social marketers like me when I was starting in my career how to work around the challenges of government bureaucracies. I was re-energized about our work every time I spoke to her and appreciated how she knew that you sometimes had to break a few rules for the greater good. As a founding Steering Committee member of the Agents of Change Summit, her passion for teaching and elevating social marketing was always evident. (Jeffrey W. Jordan, Rescue Agency)