

A Tragic Loss



The TMJ Association mourns the passing of its founder and president, Terrie Cowley, who died on July 22, 2024. Though we are bereft and grieving, we remain steadfast in our dedication to the organization’s mission. Terrie was an indefatigable leader and a stylish presence at meetings, with her red-framed glasses symbolizing her determination to secure the best science, care, and support for TMJ patients. As you read her obituary, we hope you will join us in committing to the goals she passionately pursued, encapsulated in her vision of “Changing the face of TMJ.”

Theresa Ann Cowley

July 6, 1941 ~ July 22, 2024

83 Years Old

<https://www.beckerritter.com/tributes/Theresa-Cowley>

The world lost one of its most passionate and compassionate individuals with the passing of Theresa Ann (Terrie) Malinowski Cowley on July 22, 2024 in Milwaukee. Born July 6, 1941 in Hazelton, PA, Terrie was a coal miner’s daughter whose immigrant father served in the US Army in World War I. She received a BA in political science from Millsaps College and attended the Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University. In 1986, as a result of her own failed treatment for a temporomandibular joint (jaw) disorder (TMD), she co-founded and became President of The TMJ Association, a non-profit health advocacy organization. She single-handedly tackled the issue of TMDs. Beginning in a spare bedroom of her Wauwatosa home, Terrie led the expansion of this patient centric organization into a worldwide presence. Terrie’s intimate knowledge of the plight of patients, especially those suffering the catastrophic failures of implanted materials to replace all or parts of the joint, led to a 1992 congressional investigation and oversight of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regarding the safety and efficacy of implants and

other proposed treatments. This led to increased research at the National Institutes of Health. More than that, it forced attention on the disconnect that keeps the jaws largely in the care of dentists and the rest of the orthopedic joints of the body are in the care of medical specialists. From 6 to 12 percent of the population, predominantly women, are affected by TMDs that can cause debilitating pain and dysfunction in the jaws and surrounding tissues, driven by complex biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Moreover, TMDs often are accompanied by other conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, and fibromyalgia, so much so that The TMJ Association has also established the Chronic Overlapping Pain Conditions Alliance to raise awareness of research needed for these complex disorders. Terrie's passion showed in her meetings with health professionals and researchers, agency administrators and talks at scientific meetings. Her compassion was even more evident in her listening to patients in long phone conversations and in response to emails and letters over the past three decades. Working with the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research and the FDA, her efforts led to a public-private partnership, the TMJ FDA Medical Device Epidemiology Network Patient RoundTable and to the landmark 2020 National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine report on TMDs. That report established that TMDs are complex conditions that need to be treated by physicians and not by dentists. A newly formed National Academies Forum on TMDs will now consider how to achieve interprofessional TMD educational training and the creation of a pathway to TMD care that is evidence-based, rigorous, and includes accountabilities for all practitioners. It was said that "Terrie was a force of nature". She was fiercely dedicated, selfless, with a wonderful self-deprecating sense of humor, an avid sports fan, lover of jazz and classical music, good Scotch, and a lover of all furry animals. She was forever optimistic in the face of seemingly insurmountable tasks. She was the beloved wife of some 60 years of Allen W. Cowley, Ph.D., a research physiologist at the Medical College of Wisconsin, and sister of Maria Stednitz of Nesquehoning, Pennsylvania.

The family asks that [donations be made to The TMJ Association in Terrie's name](#). PO Box 26770, Milwaukee, WI, 53226. A remembrance of life service is planned for Saturday, Sept. 21, 2024. Full details and times will be available soon.

You are also invited to share your remembrances and condolences on the tribute wall at: <https://www.beckerritter.com/tributes/Theresa-Cowley>

About The TMJ Association ... *Changing the Face of TMJ*

The TMJ Association, Ltd., is a nonprofit, patient advocacy organization whose mission is to improve the quality of health care and lives of everyone affected by Temporomandibular Disorders (TMJ). For 35 years, we have shared reliable information on TMJ with people like you. We invite you to visit our website, www.tmj.org.



The TMJ Association, Ltd., P.O. Box 26770, Milwaukee, WI 53226

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