

# Bicyclist killed by truck is remembered as skilled surgeon, scientist

By **Laura Crimaldi** Globe Staff, August 8, 2015, 10:02 p.m.



Bouquets of flowers were left at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Beacon Street as a memorial to the cyclist who was struck and killed on Friday. Photo by Barry Chin/Globe Staff. BARRY CHIN

Anita Kurmann. BUMC.BU.EDU

Anita Kurmann came to Boston from Switzerland nearly three years ago as an endocrine surgeon who wanted to put her medical training to use in a research lab.

She did that and much more, her supervisors said, forging a relationship between laboratories at

Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Boston University as they collaborated on transforming embryonic stem cells into functional thyroid tissue.

But just as she was preparing to return to Switzerland to set up her own research lab later this year, Kurmann, 38, was killed while riding her bicycle Friday morning at a busy Back Bay intersection. Her death stunned colleagues at both labs.

“She was the kind of the person you want to be your surgeon,” Dr. Tony Hollenberg said Saturday night. Hollenberg supervised Kurmann at Beth Israel.

“She was kind. She was compassionate,” he said. “She had it all. It’s a huge loss.”

Kurmann was killed after she was struck around 7:05 a.m. Friday at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Beacon Street, police said. A long flatbed tractor-trailer truck was making a right turn from Massachusetts Avenue onto Beacon Street when the fatal collision occurred.

Kurmann recently moved to Cambridge and biked often, Hollenberg said. Her fellow researchers spent Friday trying to get answers and get in touch with Kurmann’s relatives in Switzerland, Hollenberg said.

“She was European and that was the mode of transportation,” he said. “She was a great athlete.”

Dr. Darrell Kotton, who worked with Kurmann at BU’s Center for Regenerative Medicine, said he had hoped she would have a long career.

“She brought out the best in me and my team,” Kotton said. “It’s just a devastating loss.”

Hollenberg credited Kurmann with uniting the two labs.

“Because of her perseverance, her personality, her ability to get along . . . she built the bridges between our two labs,” he said.

The project she was working on related to turning embryonic stem cells into thyroid tissue was almost complete, and Kurmann was preparing the research for publication in a journal, Hollenberg said. The research was aimed at helping people who are born without a thyroid or have

their thyroid surgically removed, according to Hollenberg.

“Nothing scared her, and that’s what allowed her to be successful in this project. She didn’t know how hard it was. She just thought that all science projects were like this,” he said. “It’s an incredible loss. She was loved by everybody who ever worked with her.”

Hollenberg sent a message to colleagues saying that Kurmann came to Beth Israel to broaden her knowledge of science and she contributed to the hospital in many ways — but that she will be missed for so much more.

”Above and beyond her many professional achievements, Anita was – most importantly – brilliant in life,” he wrote. “She was dynamic and kind-hearted and the consummate friend, professional and achiever. We will miss her deeply.”

Boston Police spokesman Stephen McNulty called the investigation “active and ongoing.”

The truck and the operator have been located, McNulty said. He could not say whether investigators have spoken with the operator, and police have not named the operator.

A man at nearby Quality Market on Saturday said he was there when it happened. A witness ran into the store, he said, and yelled, “Call 911!”

“I ran outside and I [saw] her,” said the man, who only gave his name as Chafik. “When I got there, she was dead. That was it.”

The growing makeshift memorial honoring Kurmann at the site includes flowers, a Boston Bike Party sticker with a black line through it, and a copy of James Joyce’s short story “The Dead.”

Jami King, 26, of Mission Hill, biked to crash site Saturday evening and placed a mixed bouquet of flowers at the memorial.

Wiping away tears, King said she did not know Kurmann, but used to ride by that spot regularly on her way to school.

“This could have been me,” she said.

Richard Inonog, 36, and his wife, Colleen O'Malley, 34, of the South End, visited the site Saturday on their bicycles to pay tribute to Kurmann, though they did not know her.

"We're always worried because the same thing could happen to us at any time," O'Malley said as tears fell.

"There's a lot of aggression toward cyclists," she said. "You're not as valued."

Inonog said the city must implement safeguards, like well-marked bike lanes, to ensure this doesn't happen again.

"It's really stressful," he said. "You're always thinking about being safe."

A letter to Kurmann had been left earlier in a box.

The writer, who signed the note "Gretta," said people had comforted Kurmann after she was hit.

"Know your daughter left this world with love [and] concern by her side," Gretta wrote. "For a short time that I was here, she was strong."



"This could have been me," said Jami King, who biked to the site of the accident Saturday evening to place flowers at a memorial. MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

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