

Norman Breslow (21 February 1941–9 December 2015)

Norman Breslow, an emeritus professor of biostatistics at the School of Public Health of the University of Washington, passed away on Wednesday 9 December 2015. Norman will be remembered as a major figure in medical statistics, who contributed through original research to transform the analysis of epidemiological studies from an essentially empirical approach to a coherent body of rigorously based methods. Much of what is today embodied in the sophisticated computer packages for analysing epidemiological data rests on the foundations that he and other statisticians built.

Norman first joined the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in 1972. He stayed at IARC for two years, before taking up a position as an associate professor at the University of Washington, in Seattle, which led to a long research and teaching career there as a full professor. He returned to IARC for a year in 1978, to work with Nicholas Day on the production of the landmark book *Statistical Methods in Cancer Research*. As Norman stated in a recent interview, the two volumes (on case-control studies and cohort studies) were “intended not as a textbook but as a research monograph to reveal the latest developments in biostatistics as related to epidemiology”. The authors’ efforts were crowned with success, and as a result IARC became known internationally as a key centre for the development of statistical methodology in epidemiology. Characteristically, the book was based on the analysis of sets of real data, showing the interest that Norman always had in combining the most advanced research on methods (witnessed by articles published as recently as the autumn of 2015) with the investigation of substantive epidemiological topics. He provided one of the first demonstrations of the high prevalence of “latent” prostate cancer in elderly men dying from other diseases, as well as a wealth of new quantitative information on the epidemiological and clinical aspects of Wilms tumour in children.

For many years, IARC had the privilege and the pleasure of welcoming Norman as a scientist and a friend. He was fond of spending time as a mountain climber in the Alps and enjoying the sun of Provence with his family, to whom we express our deepest condolences.