Arlene Sandra Ash

Arlene Ash is a research professor of medicine at the Boston University School of Medicine and a research professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at its School of Public Health. She also is the senior health services research methodologist in BU’s Health Care Research Unit. However, before Ash earned those titles, there were her parents, who, according to Ash, “taught me to care about social justice.” This is why throughout her years of formal education, Ash spent much of her time in the roles of teacher and public servant.

Ash worked as a mathematics instructor in the Peace Corps from 1967–1969. Also, committed to eliminating gender-based barriers to professional careers, she helped found two community-based women’s self-help health centers in Chicago in the early 1970s. Since 1978, she has been involved as an expert witness in public policy issues, including the environmental impact of a nuclear power plant and equity in pay for women teachers.

Even with these accomplishments, many would say Ash’s opus is the first version of Diagnostic Cost Groups (DCG), which she helped develop and which spurred the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to introduce risk adjustment in setting capitated payment rates for managed care organizations participating in Medicare.

She also has taken DCG risk adjustment models into public and private arenas, where they have been used to improve the

“She ... has a strong internal moral and ethical compass and sets priorities for spending her time not by how her choices might appear to the outside world, but by how she feels she can make the greatest contribution to the public good.”

- Lisa I. Iezzoni, Harvard Medical School
Arlene Ash has had a fulfilling career, publishing more than 130 papers in professional journals and testifying for or speaking at an abundance of panels and conferences. Below are a few of her achievements:


Robert Wood Johnson Alpha Center invitee, Conference on Risk Differences and Health Plan Payments, 1996


Invited testimony for the Physician Payment Review Commission, 1993

Invited testimony for the Prospective Payment Assessment Commission, 1993

Invited panelist for the White House Health Reform Task Force, 1993

Methods review of a major study of severity adjustment systems for the U.S. Health Care Financing Administration, 1991

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Health, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, 1990


Recipient of the Administrator’s Citation, the Health Care Financing Administration’s highest award, for research on HMO payment models, 1988

Advisory panelist for the Health Care Financing Administration, 1985

‘causes,’ reaching outside her own specific self-interests,” said Lisa I. Iezzoni, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. “She made amply clear that ensuring the well-being of her beloved Fenway neighborhood of Boston was equally as important to her—if not more so—than preparing yet another research manuscript.”

A recent picture of Arlene Ash in Budapest, Hungary