

SUSAN LOVE

b. February 9, 1948

d. July 2, 2023

BREAST-HEALTH PIONEER

“Take care of yourself mentally, physically, and spiritually so that you can take care of the world.”

She was a pioneering breast cancer researcher and women’s health advocate.

Susan M. Love, M.D., was a surgeon, a pioneering women’s breast-health advocate and researcher, and the cofounder of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. She also served as a clinical professor of surgery at Harvard and UCLA.

Love was born in New Jersey and grew up in Puerto Rico and Mexico, where her father’s job took the family. Her interest in science began in Catholic high school. She studied pre-med in college for two years, then dropped out to join a convent. After six months, she left to continue her education.

In 1974 Love earned her M.D. with honors from State University of New York Downstate Medical School. She completed her residency at Beth Israel Medical Center in Boston and became its first female general surgeon. At Beth Israel, she met her life partner, Dr. Helen Cooksey. A critic of the male-dominated medical establishment’s approach to women’s health, Love became a trailblazing advocate for breast conservation surgery at a time when radical mastectomy was the standard and largely unnecessary treatment for breast cancer. She worked for leading cancer institutes and was recruited to establish Boston’s Faulkner Breast Center in 1988. Staffed solely by female physicians, it was the first facility of its kind in the nation.

In 1989, after Love gave birth to a daughter, she and Cooksey waged a four-year legal battle to jointly adopt their child and for the birth certificate to list them as co-parents. In a groundbreaking decision, years before same-sex marriage was legal, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in their favor. The experience prompted Love to advocate for the rights of other LGBT parents.

In 1990 Love published “Dr. Susan Love’s Breast Book,” the definitive resource for women with breast cancer. The following year, she cofounded the National Breast Cancer Coalition. Its advocacy helped increase federal funding for breast cancer research by nearly 500 percent.

Love gave up surgical practice in 1996 to focus on the causes and prevention of breast cancer through her own research foundation. Her work led to the publication of “Dr. Susan Love’s Menopause and Hormone Book” in 1998. The same year, she earned an executive MBA from UCLA, and President Clinton appointed her to the National Cancer Advisory Board, where she served until 2004. In 2008 she launched the Love Research Army, which recruited hundreds of thousands of volunteers for breast cancer research.

Love and Cooksey wed in San Francisco in 2004, when Mayor Gavin Newsom was defiantly issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Love died of leukemia in 2023. The New York Times published her obituary.



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