

UCSD radiologist honored for skill, compassion and strength

By David Singband
San Diego Independent

Twelve years ago, Dr. Linda K. Olson lost both legs and an arm when a train struck her car during a trip in Europe. The three other passengers escaped unharmed.

Today, Olson is an associate professor of clinical radiology at the UCSD School of Medicine and associate chief of the radiology department at the UCSD School of Medicine.

"She's never let that horrible disability stand in her way," said Dr. Robert N. Berk, professor of radiology at UCSD. "We're all just in awe of her strength to be so successful."

Berk recently nominated Olson for the Marie Curie Award, given annually by the American Association of Women Radiologists (AAWR) to an individual who has contributed to radiology. The award is named for the French chemist who discovered radium. Olson will receive the award at the Dec. 3 AAWR luncheon in Chicago.

"I am one of the luckier people around, I think," Olson said. "I work with

a wonderful group of people at UCSD. They gave me a chance to prove, as a disabled person, that I could do what I set out to do."

After her accident, Olson took a year off from her residency for rehabilitation at the Naval Hospital in San Diego, where she learned to walk on artificial legs. She then finished her residency at White Memorial Medical Center in Los Angeles and completed a computed tomography fellowship at UCSD.

Olson credited her husband, David Hodgens, also a physician, for the smoothness her recovery. Hodgens took care of everything from housework to bolstering her spirits, encouraging her to finish her residency and have children, Olson said. "(He was) strong-willed and very emotionally secure person, determined to make things work," she said. "He didn't marry me for my arms and legs."

Olson's clinical skills are second-to-none and her dedication to her patients and her students is exemplary, Berk said. She regularly volunteers her time to educate the public about mammographies and counsels women with breast cancer,



Dr. Linda K. Olson

he added.

"She is an absolute superstar in every category you can imagine," Berk said. "She is absolutely one of the best radiologists in the hospital. She's an excellent and skilled teacher."

Berk believes Olson's disability con-

tributes to her rapport with patients. "She has to be just a little more sensitive because of the ordeal she's been through," he said.

Olson disagreed, saying the accident hasn't dramatically influenced her personality or methods of dealing with patients. "People who knew me before the accident and knew me after the accident said I didn't change," Olson said. "In the long run, I feel it has made me less intimidating to patients. Most people seem to find it easy to be more open with me."

The almost 60 members of the radiology department are proud one of their own will be honored, according to Berk. "She is an honorable, sophisticated and all-around delightful person," Berk said. "We are all very proud and honored to be in the same department with her."

Olson seemed uncomfortable with the attention the award has brought and tried to downplay her achievements because she sees them "as the same as what everyone else does," she said. "(The award) doesn't change anything. It's a nice compliment."