

Tribute to Barbara Ansell, 1923-2001

Barbara Ansell was an acknowledged pioneer and leader in pediatric rheumatology and an absolute model of the best that a physician can be. Many things about her are legendary: her generosity and collegiality, her devotion to her patients, her honest and important studies, and her amazing ability to keep up with the newest ideas. It is greatly to her credit that pediatric rheumatology is today a recognized and valued subspecialty in both pediatrics and in rheumatology.

Barbara was born on August 30th, 1923, the daughter of Herbert Joseph Ansell, the Mayor of Warwick. She attended the King's High School for Girls in Warwick, and Birmingham University Medical School, earning a Queen's Scholarship in 1945. During the difficult years of the Second World War, she was not only a student, but also became the part time supervisor and grower of vegetables for a number of children who came under the care of her family during the London Blitz.

Barbara Ansell qualified in medicine with a distinction in surgery, but after an almost chance encounter, she became a senior registrar with Professor Eric Bywaters at Hammersmith Hospital. Thus began a lifelong rich collaboration in pediatric rheumatology. After the Second World War, Professor Bywaters had been appointed as director of a new Special Unit for Juvenile Rheumatism at the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital, a wartime hospital that had been built in the countryside on a site donated by Lady Astor from the Cliveden Estate. In 1955 this Unit was designated as a Medical Research Council Unit. Barbara Ansell joined the Taplow Unit in 1950.

Up until the 1940s, the major rheumatic disease affecting English children had been acute rheumatic fever, but during the years following the war, rheumatic fever became much less frequent with the advent of better living conditions and penicillin for streptococcal infections. Professor Bywaters and his unit were then left with a group of children with various forms of chronic arthritis and rheumatic diseases, most notably juvenile chronic arthritis. Professor Bywaters recruited a number of registrars and junior doctors to assist him in developing this unit for children with chronic rheumatic disease. Working with the remarkable staff that Professor Bywaters had gathered around him at Taplow, Dr. Ansell very quickly became a leader in studying and caring for the children with these forms of rheumatic disease, which had not been well studied or categorized. She was a pioneer in defining disease states, describing disease states, studying various forms of therapy, and documenting patterns and manifestations of disease. Her approach to therapy was holistic, with heavy emphasis on physical and

occupational therapy, career training, and involvement of families in care. During her professional life she became both a pioneer and a leader in pediatric rheumatology.

Barbara Ansell was everywhere a beacon light in her profession, a mentor and teacher to rheumatologists and health professionals in many countries. She helped us to understand the needs of children with chronic diseases, and the importance of a team approach to their care. She worked seamlessly with her team: allied health professionals — the physical and occupational therapists and the nurses; her medical colleagues — the orthopedists, the ophthalmologists, the psychiatrists; and many others — the school teacher, the librarian, the hospital photographer, to name a few. The unit that Barbara Ansell and Professor Bywaters maintained at Taplow was a model of people working together effectively and pleasantly and skillfully for the good of children with complicated problems. No one has ever done it better. All of us in the world learned from Barbara's work, and from the personal example she shared so generously.

On the closing of the MRC Rheumatism Unit at Taplow with the retirement of Professor Bywaters in 1975, Barbara Ansell continued her leadership in pediatric rheumatology at Northwick Park and Wexham Hospitals. She was also a frequent consultant in rheumatology at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London. When Barbara began her career in pediatric rheumatology, there were virtually no specialists in that field and few designated services. Today, there are more than 30 pediatric rheumatologists in Great Britain alone, and Dr. Ansell's influence in this field has been extended to Europe where there is now a thriving European Society of Pediatric Rheumatology, to the Americas, and to many other parts of the world. Barbara served on numerous committees concerned with the issues of rheumatic disease and rehabilitation for children with handicaps. She was a prolific writer of articles, professional papers, and textbooks, and an exemplary lecturer. She was appointed Consultant in 1962. In 1967 she became a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and in 1985 an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. She was honored by a CBE in 1992.

Barbara was a kind and faithful friend to her colleagues and patients, adults and children alike. She welcomed many people to her home, and she was a welcome guest in many homes around the world. She had a marvelously inquisitive mind, with broad interests in music, theater, history, politics, and current events. She was a good listener and an entertaining conversationalist, ever the gracious hostess, and good company for all times.

Barbara Ansell died on September 14th, 2001. She was married to Dr. Angus Weston, a medical colleague, who preceded her in death. She was a great lady, a marvelous physician and teacher, a fine human being, and a dear friend to many. She will surely remain a major presence in the field of pediatric rheumatology.

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