

Obituary

Dr Barbara Mary Ansell, CBE, FRCP, FRCS, FRCPCH

1923–2001

Friends and colleagues with or without arthritis from all over the world met in Southwark Cathedral on 16 February 2002 to remember and celebrate the life and work of Barbara Ansell, the doyen of paediatric rheumatology. So ended another chapter in the History of Paediatric Rheumatology—a book with a preface by Thomas Phaire and the first chapter by Sir George Frederic Still.

Dr Ansell, a Midlander, was educated at the Kings High School, Warwick and at Birmingham University (MB ChB 1946, MD with Honours 1969). She held the virtually unique distinction of Fellowship of three Royal Colleges (Physicians of London 1967, Surgeons of England 1985, and Paediatrics and Child Health 1997). In 1982 she was awarded the CBE. She was author of over 360 papers in adult and paediatric rheumatology and was an honorary member or fellow of over 16 national and international societies.

She first went to the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital, Taplow in 1951 having been enticed by Professor Eric Bywaters and worked there until its closure in 1985. She became a consultant at Taplow in 1962, and at Northwick Park Hospital in 1976. She was an honorary consultant at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street. She retired from the Health Service and the MRC in 1988 but continued in active practice until her final illness.

At Taplow, she developed an interest in juvenile arthritis, developing a classification based on pattern of disease presentation. This formed her MD thesis and is still the basis for the current ILAR classification. She worked closely with the Arthritis Research Campaign, Arthritis Care, and latterly the Children's Chronic Arthritis Association. She was the first Chairman of the EULAR Standing Committee on Paediatric Rheumatology and stimulated the foundation of the British Paediatric Rheumatology Group and the Paediatric Rheumatology European Society.

The focus of attention was always the growing child or young person. Development of educational and social skills was just as important as disease control, and Barbara always looked to the future and the consequences in adult life of decisions taken during childhood. She developed a team of supporting professionals (physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses, teachers, social workers, ophthalmologists, orthopaedic surgeons, dentists, and podiatrists) often ensuring that everyone went to scientific meetings. She was the master of the peripatetic clinic and travelled widely in the UK and abroad. Trainees came from all over the world and returned to their own countries to develop services. In the early days treatments were few, but as time went on regimes for steroids, anti-inflammatories, and methotrexate were developed. Cohort studies looked at outcome.

Always a larger than life presence, she was an astute clinician relying on skills of history, examination, experience, and nous. She was usually right, and her memory was legendary. Known for her long hours of work and high standards, she expected a lot from her team. While she could reduce both



patients and staff to tears, her laugh was recognised by everyone. Outside medicine she loved entertaining, the opera, and teddy bears.

She laid the foundation of the national service for children with arthritis. The speciality has been recognised as a sub-speciality of paediatrics since 1995. There are active research programmes in basic science, clinical, and therapeutic areas, and training programmes. There are now four academic units in Britain and, most importantly, collaboration between professional disciplines. *Archives* had commissioned a number of articles from the British Paediatric Rheumatology Group at the time of Barbara's death. Authorship was designed to encourage young workers crossing professional boundaries and address the issues of today, and these papers are dedicated to her memory. The motto of her university is "Per ardua ad alta". She put in the effort—something we can all try to emulate.

Richard Hull, *Convenor*

Helen Venning, *Past Convenor*

British Paediatric Rheumatology Group



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Richard Hull and Helen Venning

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