**Who is Barbara Ansell?**

Dr Barbara Ansell was a Midlander and essentially the co-founder of paediatric and adolescent rheumatology here in the UK with Eric Bywaters. She wrote over 360 academic papers in adult, adolescent and paediatric rheumatology and was an honorary member or fellow of over 16 national and international societies. In 1982 she was awarded the CBE. 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).

Barbara first worked at the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital, Taplow in 1951, recruited by Eric Bywaters to join part-time in the MRC juvenile rheumatism unit set up in 1948 at the hospital, and did her thesis with him on arthritis in children. She took over as director after the retirement of E Bywaters, then J Holborow, until its closure in 1985. She became a consultant at Taplow in 1962, and at Northwick Park Hospital in 1976. Not many women held similar positions of power at the time. At Taplow, she identified the different types of arthritis and connective diseases which occurred in childhood and showed that they were different pathologically and genetically to those which occurred in adults. She was involved in developing a classification of arthritis that starts in childhood or adolescence based on pattern of disease presentation (the basis for the current ILAR classification) which is still used today to diagnose JIA.

**A focus on young people and research**

Barbara’s focus of attention was always the growing child or young person, and early on, she recognised that children and young people were not all receiving specialised care that they needed. She believed that the development of educational and social skills were just as important as disease control, and always considered 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) that gave her young people holistic care. She championed research and often ensured that all her team went to scientific meetings.

She worked closely with the Arthritis Research Campaign and Arthritis Care (Versus Arthritis’ pre- merger charities). 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 (PReS). 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.

**A role model and a trail blazer**

People who worked with Barbara remember her as a larger than life, stern character who expected her team to be on their toes and contribute fully. She was a fantastic role model and a trail blazer; a very sharp clinician with good intuition. She could be explosive at times and didn’t stand fools, although she also had a softer side. She liked working with her children and really cared for them. She insisted that parents get involved with their children’s care and where possible, stay with them. Schooling and holistic care were important. Barbara prescribed the children to have physiotherapy sessions which was part of the care package at a time when there weren’t any treatment drugs available.

Barbara genuinely wanted to combine research with best clinical care for children and young people, and she was an example of doing both well. Young people and their families would come from all over the country to see and be treated by her. While at first the most severely ill children with arthritis were referred to her, she recognised this was impracticable, and set up regional paediatric rheumatology clinics across the UK, which she would visit at weekends to consult and support the local rheumatologists.

**An international woman and exceptional hostess**

Fellows travelled from all over the world to study and learn from Barbara and she gave and attended talks all over the world. She always had a question to ask and would come up to you at your presentation and talk about your data. Those who presented their work to her said that she made you felt noticed, *“have you thought about this? What about the patients?”* She said her greatest contribution was *“training doctors all over the world that children with arthritis are not just miniature adults.”.*

Outside medicine she loved entertaining, the opera, and teddy bears. The opera is an interest also shared by her successor Professor Patricia Woo who took on from her, built the Unit at GOSH and UCL and then BSPAR (first called the BPRG).

Patricia remembers Barbara as being an excellent host and cook. She would host dinner parties with her husband Angus. Barbara loved entertaining and cooking, and this gave opportunity for both young and old people to mix. It was an occasion for people to circulate and discuss whatever they wish. She was a very good hostess, but that was part of her objective - to keep visitors entertained and foster interactions between colleagues. People had come from different countries, and she would build a rapport, extending her welcome to everyone. Her big personality got her to where she was; she had a loud voice and big presence.

**The memorial service at Southwark Cathedral**

Barbara Ansell passed away in 2001 and a memorial service was held in her name at Southwark Cathedral. Patricia organised the music of the day. Bobby Jarvis, physio from Taplow organised a poster exhibition of those days from Taplow. Professor Lucy Wedderburn remembers it as an amazing and full service. People came from all over the world to pay their respects to Barbara. A few memories of Barbara Ansell from her colleagues include: She was *“A wonderful teacher”, “Visionary”, “Well ahead of her time.”*

**Barbara still influencing the future of Adolescent and Young Adult Rheumatology**

There was still a major need for pushing forward the research agenda in adolescent and young adult rheumatology. Dr Debajit Sen (Co-director Versus Arthritis UK Centre for Adolescent Rheumatology) chaired a steering group of clinicians and researchers from across the UK, who had this as their aim.

Today we have the Barbara Ansell National Network for Adolescent Rheumatology, BANNAR. Dr Rachel Tattersall, the first BANNAR Chair, set up the formal network wanting to use Barbara’s name. It was agreed that we wanted to commemorate Barbara's influence by incorporating her name in the network’s name. This led to some attempts at finding a suitable acronym and we landed on BANNAR thinking we could raise the *banner* for adolescent research through BANNAR.

BANNAR is seen as a crucial network in the niche area of adolescent *and* young adult rheumatology. Lucy Wedderburn recalls that until we had BANNAR, people conducting adolescent research weren’t joined up. They felt isolated and couldn’t support each other. We now have a network of people from all across the UK. It feeds progress and gives a forum in this growing field. People learn a lot from the network. Having a diagnosis of arthritis is an isolating time for young people, and also for their physicians. Having the free, accessible BANNAR network has so many advantages; it brings people, their ideas, and research together and is a space where you can have your peers think about your research ahead of planning, which in turn, enhances engagement.

Barbara was indeed a pioneer in adolescent and young adult rheumatology and has paved the way for so many other clinicians who work in this underrepresented area of medicine. She is the reason that we have the B name not only in BANNAR but also the Ansell Address at both British Society of Rheumatology and PReS conferences!

**Thank you to contributors Professor Lucy Wedderburn, Professor Patricia Woo and Dr Rachel Tattersall. Author, Sarah Yorke, BANNAR Project Officer 2020 - 2023**