Giants in Chest Medicine

Peter J. Barnes, MA, DM, DSc, Master FCCP

Editor’s Note: This series recognizes and highlights the accomplishments of individuals who have contributed greatly to chest medicine. To view the video interview with Dr Barnes, go to journal.publications.chestnet.org

Chance may have led Peter J. Barnes, MA, DM, DSc, Master FCCP, to respiratory medicine, but that chance decision led him to a long, accomplished career in respiratory research and education. More than 35 years ago, Dr Barnes faced an age-old dilemma: how to get a position without experience. After being turned down for research positions in endocrinology and gastroenterology, he was accepted into an asthma research project at Hammersmith Hospital. That first research opportunity sparked his enthusiasm and led to a lifetime career devoted to research and teaching in airway diseases. His findings have been instrumental in transforming the practice of chest medicine into its current state.

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Many of the current treatment methods for asthma patients, such as the use of inhaled steroids, can be attributed to his early research. Dr Barnes was the first to map the distribution of receptors in the lung using autoradiography. His group investigated the role of neuropeptides in asthma. He also investigated how β-agonists and corticosteroids interact in the treatment of asthma. He used these same approaches to study COPD. His research notably impacted the current understanding of the mechanisms underlying asthma and COPD and how current therapies for these diseases work.

While his curriculum vitae encompasses a full 93 pages, I will summarize his accomplishments here. Dr Barnes completed his preclinical studies at Cambridge University and clinical studies at Oxford University Medical School, graduating from the latter with BM and BCh degrees in 1972.

Since 1987, Dr Barnes has held the positions of professor of thoracic medicine at the National Heart and Lung Institute, head of respiratory medicine at Imperial College, and honorary consultant physician at Royal Brompton Hospital, London.

His contributions to the medical literature are numerous. Dr Barnes has published >1,000 peer-reviewed articles on asthma, COPD, and related topics and has written or edited >40 books.

And the list of his noteworthy accomplishments continues. Dr Barnes is among the top 50 most highly cited researchers in the world and has been the most highly cited clinical scientist in Europe. For the past 20 years, he has been the most highly cited respiratory researcher in the world. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 2007, the first respiratory researcher to be so honored in the past 150 years.
Dr Barnes has given several prestigious honor lectures around the world, including three at annual meetings of the American College of Chest Physicians: the Marks lecture in 1996, the College Medalist lecture in 2002, and the Manual Albertal Memorial lecture in 2004. The College Medalist lecture recognizes meritorious service in furthering progress in the field of diseases of the chest.

In 2012, it was my honor to nominate Dr Barnes for master fellow of the American College of Chest Physicians, which he received based upon his professional preeminence, his extraordinary contributions, and his years of service to the ACCP and this Journal.

Dr Barnes has also received honorary MD degrees from the University of Ferrara in Italy, the University of Athens in Greece, the University of Tampere in Finland, and the University of Leuven in Belgium. These honors attest to the international recognition of his extraordinary contributions. Currently, Dr Barnes serves as president of the European Respiratory Society.

As the editor-in-chief of CHEST, I can personally attest to the invaluable insight that Dr Barnes has shared, serving to elevate the quality and stature of the journal. As an associate editor, he has been an advisor, reviewer, and contributor par excellence.

It is my pleasure to declare that Dr Barnes has been selected to be one of the giants in chest medicine. Through his work, he has advanced chest medicine and our understanding of asthma and COPD. Quite remarkably, even though he has attained international prominence, Dr Barnes is never too busy to advise/mentor others about their research, projects, and presentations. Not only does he answer e-mails and telephone calls in a timely manner, he does so in an approachable way.

In his video interview, which can be found at (http://dx.doi.org/10.1378/chest.13-2215), Dr Barnes encourages researchers to adapt, “to engage in new thoughts and see where it takes you.” Those words certainly speak to the level of his accomplishments and unique ability to forge new ground.

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SUGGESTED READINGS


To M, Ito K, Assin PM, Kharitonov SA, Barnes PJ. Osteoprotegerin in sputum is a potential biomarker in COPD. *Chest*. 2011;140(1):76-83.


