

Baruch S Blumberg

Discovered hepatitis B virus and developed a diagnostic test and vaccine

Baruch “Barry” Blumberg learnt a primary mission of medical research while caring for poor and chronically ill people in the crowded wards of New York City’s Bellevue Hospital. It was the early 1950s, and the young intern saw scenes that he would later describe as “reminiscent of [William] Hogarth’s woodcuts of the public institutions of 18th century London,” adding, “Anyone who has been immersed in the world of a busy city hospital, a world of wretched lives, of hope destroyed by devastating illness, cannot easily forget that an objective of big medical research is, in the end, the prevention and cure of disease.”

Blumberg never forgot that objective. After he discovered the elusive cancer causing hepatitis B virus in blood serum from an infected Australian aborigine and described it in a 1967 paper, he developed a diagnostic test to screen for the virus in blood, eliminating the virus from US blood banks (*Ann Intern Med* 1967;66:924-31). He then helped develop a hepatitis B vaccine, now widely used around the world and credited with saving millions of lives.

Jonathan Chernoff, chief scientific officer at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia, where Blumberg was associated from 1964 for the rest of his life, said, “It’s fair to say that Barry prevented more cancer deaths than any person who’s ever lived.”

Shovelling manure

In 1976 he was co-winner of the Nobel prize in medicine for “discoveries concerning new mechanisms for the origin and dissemination of infectious diseases.” In accepting the honour, Blumberg, an avid outdoorsman who cycled, hiked, canoed, and ran, noted that he was part owner of a farm that supplied beef. Displaying his playful sense of humour and humility, he said, “Shovelling manure for a day is an excellent counterbalance to intellectual work.”

Baruch Samuel Blumberg died recently aged 85. He was born on 28 July 1925 in Brooklyn, attending an elementary Hebrew parochial school. He joined the US navy in 1943 during the second world war, serving as a deck officer on landing ships. After earning a bachelors degree in physics in 1946 at Union Collage in Schenectady, New York, he began graduate work in mathematics at Columbia Univer-

sity in New York City. But his father, a lawyer, suggested that he switch to medicine, and he enrolled in 1947 in Columbia’s College of Physicians and Surgeons.

After his third year of medical school, Blumberg and fellow parasitology students spent a few months at a remote mining camp in the South American tropical nation of Suriname, delivering babies, performing clinical services, and conducting public health surveys. It was there that he became fascinated with “infectious agents” and was the first of many research field trips he would make in subsequent years to isolated spots around the world.

Blumberg earned his medical degree in 1951, followed by the internship and residency at Bellevue Hospital. In 1955 he moved to Oxford University as a member of Balliol College to begin work in biochemistry. It was the beginning of his lifelong love affair with the United Kingdom. After earning his doctorate in 1957, he returned to the United States to take a position at the National Institutes of Health, staying until 1964, when he moved to the Institute for Cancer Research in Philadelphia, now the Fox Chase Cancer Center.

In addition Blumberg was professor of medicine, medical genetics, and medical anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. After spending time again at Oxford in 1972 as visiting fellow at Trinity College and in 1983 as Eastman visiting professor at Balliol College, he was elected as master of Balliol, serving from 1989 to 1994. Andrew Graham, a friend of Blumberg’s and current master of Balliol, remembers watching “Barry cycling furiously along the towpath, encouraging the Balliol rowers.”

In 1997, back in the US, Blumberg joined the human biology programme at Stanford University. While there he attended an astrobiology workshop at NASA’s Ames research centre in Mountain View, California, and became fascinated with the subject and was recruited as director of NASA’s new

astrobiology institute, serving until 2002. His medical research background and intense natural curiosity made him a perfect choice to organise interdisciplinary teams to study whether life exists elsewhere in the universe and how life began and evolved on earth, which included studying the ocean bottom and geothermal cauldrons.

Killer virus

Among his other honours were election to the National Academy of Sciences and the National Inventors Hall of Fame. In 2002 he published his autobiography, *Hepatitis B: The Hunt for a Killer*

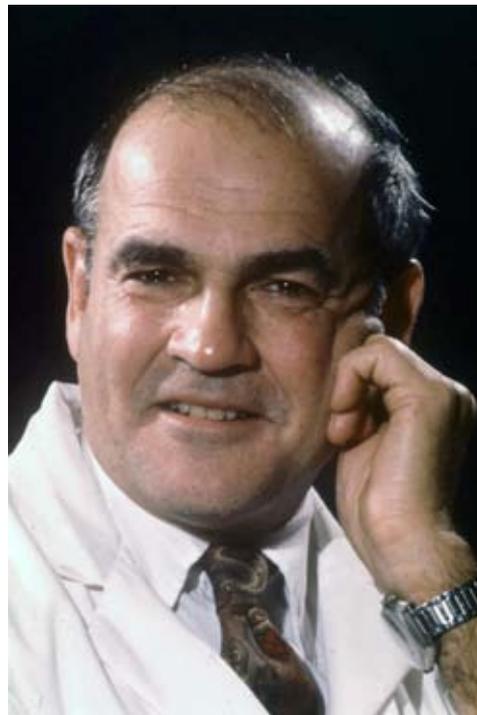
Virus, and in 2005 he was elected president of the American Philosophical Society. He never stopped in his pursuit of knowledge. “Barry was endlessly energetic, inquisitive, and outward looking,” said Dr Graham.

On the last day of his life Blumberg was participating in workshop at NASA’s Ames Research Center. Shortly after delivering the keynote address, he collapsed, dying of an apparent heart attack. He leaves his wife, Jean, whom he married in 1954, and four children.

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Baruch S Blumberg, pathologist and physiologist (b 1925; q 1951, Columbia), died on 5 April 2011 from a heart attack.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2011;342:d2666



“Barry prevented more cancer deaths than any person who’s ever lived”

John Sutton Bennett

Former associate general secretary Canadian Medical Association (b 1920; q St. Mary's Hospital, London, 1953; FRCS(C), FAGO, FASAS), died from heart failure on 18 February 2011.

Born and schooled in South Wales, John Sutton Bennett was a Spitfire pilot with the Royal Air Force's 74 Tiger Squadron during the second world war. He emigrated to Canada two years after qualifying, first to Newfoundland and then British Columbia. In 1969 he joined the Canadian Medical Association as director of scientific councils. His influence throughout North America and the Caribbean was prodigious, and he was a strong supporter of the Commonwealth Medical Association. He retired in 1991. A polymath, John kept himself fit physically and mentally. He hand-carved Victorian-style wooden rocking horses, and was a faithful correspondent to a host of eclectic friends. He leaves Robina, his wife of 62 years; two children; and two grandchildren.

Alexander Macara

Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2516

Brahman Nallanathan Gobikrishnan



Specialty doctor in addictions psychiatry Wellpark Centre, Greenock (b 1964; q Jaffna, Sri Lanka, 1993; MRCPsych), died on 3 September 2010 from complications following bone marrow transplantation for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia.

Born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Brahman Nallanathan Gobikrishnan ("Gobi") spent his childhood in New Zealand before studying medicine in Sri Lanka. After qualifying, he worked in northern Sri Lanka during the protracted civil war, moving to accident and emergency medicine in Colombo

before working for the ministry of health. Gobi trained in psychiatry in the United Kingdom, specialising in addictive disorders, particularly complex alcohol dependence. His special gift was a warm interest in people from all walks of life. He had many friends, and mentored many overseas doctors, helping with their professional and personal needs. He leaves a wife, Shasi, and two sons.

Audrey Hillman

James Loudon

Jerard Tharumanayagam

Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2514

Peter Rex Greenfield



Former senior principal medical officer Department of Health and Social Security (b 1931; q Cambridge/St George's Hospital, London, 1957), d 30 December 2010.

Six months before qualifying, Peter Rex Greenfield developed bulbar polio, putting an end to his singing and rowing days. After house jobs he moved to Robertsbridge, East Sussex, where he lived for the rest of his life. He was a general practitioner for nearly 11 years before joining the Department of Health and Social Security. He helped draft the modern format of the *British National Formulary*, chairing the Greenfield report on effective prescribing. In retirement he worked part time for Incapacity Benefit panels and the Appeals Service. He was also trustee for the Chaseley Trust in Eastbourne, and active in St John Ambulance, local schools, youth groups, and the Church. He leaves a wife, Faith; 10 children; and 27 grandchildren.

Faith Greenfield

Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2225

Georgina Hill

Former community medical officer Belfast (b 1916; q Queen's University, Belfast, 1934), d 10 May 2010.

Georgina Hill ("Georgia") was one of 12 female medical students in her academic year; all but one predeceased her. After graduation and a spell in the Royal Army Medical Corps, she returned to Belfast to work briefly in infectious diseases and soon found her niche as a community medical officer. Her lengthy career often spanned several generations of local families, many of whom still remember fondly her genuine interest in and care for them above and beyond the call of duty. Georgia's greatest interests were reading (she read the *BMJ* until her death at 94 years), her caravan in Donegal, golf, and friends and family. Her Christian faith sustained her through adult life. She never married.

Rachel Deyermond

Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2517

Christine Ivory



Former consultant radiologist Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust and Mermaid Centre (Treliske), Truro (b 1947; q Royal Free 1970; MRCOG, FRCR), died from metastatic breast cancer on 23 January 2011.

Christine Ivory won a gold medal during specialist training in obstetrics and then trained in radiology because of her interest in ultrasonography. She developed and led the antenatal ultrasound service as a consultant in York, and was clinical director of the radiology directorate. In 2001 she moved to the Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust to do general reporting, ultrasonography, and computed tomography, but undertook most of her commitments in the Mermaid Centre Breast Unit. Although no longer in a lead or directorship role, she became an esteemed and trusted colleague. Cheerful and approachable, Christine

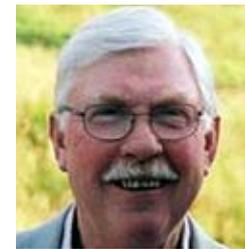
also had green fingers and was an accomplished sailor and watercolour artist. She leaves a husband, Peter, and a daughter.

Anna Murphy

Donna Christensen

Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2518

Angus Macdonald



Former consultant dermatologist Kent and Sussex Hospital (b 1935; q Edinburgh 1953; FRCP), d 7 November 2010.

Angus Macdonald was born in Burma. Following his father, he was the fifth generation bearing the same name and studying medicine at Edinburgh. Here he supplemented his income by playing the piano accordion and working on the building site of the Pitlochry hydroelectric scheme. He was ship's doctor with P&O before specialising in London and becoming consultant in Sevenoaks and then Tunbridge Wells. He bought a farm nearby, where he reared animals, and he established a computing accounts company—still in existence—out of his interest in IT and his NHS work in patient record management. He retired in 2001, renovating a house in the Dordogne using skills acquired as a student. Predeceased by his first wife, Sue, he leaves his second wife, Anne, three children, three stepchildren, and six grandchildren.

Angus Macdonald

Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2515

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