

## *Tribute*

*Barry George Firkin, Professor Emeritus of Medicine (Monash University) and medical historian, 3 August 1930–12 January 2001*

BORN IN NEWCASTLE, NEW SOUTH WALES, BARRY FIRKIN UNDERTOOK undergraduate medical training at the University of Sydney gaining a BSc. (Med) in 1952 and Honours in MB BS in 1954. He became a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 1967 and of the Royal College of Pathologists Australasia in 1977.

After graduation his research interests in haematology and bleeding disorders were developed at the Royal Prince Alfred Clinical Research Unit (CRU) in Sydney, and further honed at the Department of Medicine, Washington University. Returning to Sydney in 1961 to become Director of the CRU he promoted a strong and focused team research effort. He also held academic and clinical posts, and that same year was one of the main forces in the establishment of the Australian Society for Medical Research of which he was foundation president.

In 1969 Barry moved to Melbourne as head of department at the Monash University Clinical School at the Alfred Hospital after successfully performing the first bone marrow transplant in Australia in 1967. Here he continued his research, the treatment of patients with haematological problems, as well as directing the teaching of an academic department. In addition to being awarded a number of medical and college prizes, Barry was honoured by being made a life member of the Australian Society for Medical Research and of the Australasian Society of Thrombosis and Haemostasis. He published more than 120 papers, contributed to and wrote books on blood disorders, and sat on the editorial board of a number of journals.

In 1976 Barry became a member of the Victorian branch of the Australian Medical Association's Society of History, later the Medical History Society of Victoria (MHSV). In 1988 he joined the American Association for the History of Medicine and was a founding member of the Australian Society for Medical History (ASHM) established in

1990. Barry was a regular attender at local meetings of the MHSV and at the biennial conferences of the ASHM, contributing a number of papers on diverse and interesting topics.

Barry's major contribution to medical history is the book *Dictionary of Medical Eponyms*, co-authored by Judith Whitworth and first published in 1987 and reprinted two years later. Sensibly the possessive case for eponyms is not used, a practice well recommended but not yet fully established in medical writing. The book sets out to list the eponyms used in internal medicine in Australia and the reader is soon alerted to the problems of naming medical conditions/items after people. Most eponyms listed are attributed to the person or persons who first described the item, although for many more recent eponyms the name of the patient first described with the particular disorder has been used. For some eponyms the origins are obscure, and some are inappropriate. The use of medical eponyms has been often debated but, as stated in the preface, they are likely to remain in use even though some will stay and some will vanish. This book will remain as a testament to Barry Firkin's commitment to medicine and to medical history.

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