

Dr Herbert Barrie

Inspirational paediatrician who pioneered advances in the resuscitation of newborn babies

DR HERBERT BARRIE, who has died aged 89, was a leading paediatrician and a pioneer in neonatology and the care of the preterm infant.

At Charing Cross Hospital, where he was head of the department of child health, his department accepted referrals not just from the local community but also from other hospitals afar. It was here that he built his Special Care Baby Unit, which became a hotbed of innovation and expertise.

Reserved and quietly thoughtful (in *Who's Who* he listed as one of his hobbies "wishful thinking"), Barrie assessed patients by careful listening. He was an inspirational teacher, especially on ward rounds and case presentations. He would follow his juniors' careers with great interest and they were always devoted to him. He was a champion of the weak or poor and showed considerable obstinacy in furthering their cause both publicly and, too, in smaller ways in his work.

Once, on a family holiday to Rome, he was smitten by a porcelain tondo hanging in the hotel bedroom. It was of the Virgin and child, and he was adamant that something like this should adorn the wall above the bank of incubators back in London. The hotel manager was not prepared to sell it so Barrie embarked on a search of the city for a pottery. He struck lucky on the third day and returned to London with his own prized glazed piece to hang in the hospital.

Herbert Barrie was born Herbert Bihari in Berlin on October 9 1927. His parents were Jewish; his mother Ida was born in Lwów, Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his father, Emil



Barrie: he was a champion of the weak or poor

Bihari, was from Budapest. In the early stages of the First World War, Lwów was captured by the Russians. Emil was a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Army which had been sent, in 1915, from Budapest to recapture Galicia.

In 1937 the family fled Nazi Germany and came to Britain. Herbert won a scholarship to Wallington County Grammar School, and from there went on to University College Hospital Medical School, London, where he qualified in 1950. In his final year at medical school he changed his surname to Barrie.

After house appointments at University College Hospital he took a paediatric registrar post at Great Ormond Street, and then spent a year as research fellow at Harvard University and the Children's

Medical Center in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1959 he was appointed Senior Registrar, then five years later Senior Lecturer at St Thomas's Hospital, London. There he worked with Dennis Cottom, who was at the forefront of the emerging speciality of neonatal care.

This was a time of rapid medical advances, particularly in respiratory support, which were at last making the survival of premature newborn babies a reality. Very few babies born before 32 weeks survived, and those who did often suffered neurological impairment.

There was not, at that time, the technology for newborn ventilation and intravenous nutrition. Barrie pioneered advances in resuscitation of the newborn, publishing his findings and his research widely.

His time at St Thomas's was probably the happiest of his professional life and it was during his seven years there that he met, and then married, Dr Dinah Castle.

In 1966 Barrie was appointed consultant paediatrician to the new Charing Cross Hospital in Hammersmith (the hospital was in the process of moving from The Strand). With the help of funds raised by the grateful parents of premature babies he had saved, Barrie built a paediatric research laboratory there. The hospital trustees gave him a small patch of land on which to construct this project, and in time the laboratory employed a full-time technician and carried out cutting-edge research into neonatal respiratory physiology and intensive care.

In 1983, after the retirement of Hugh Jolly, Barrie became physician in charge of the department of paediatrics at Charing Cross Hospital and the department thrived

as a centre of excellence at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. However, the reorganisation of London's hospitals in the late 1980s forced a merger of Charing Cross Hospital Medical School with that of the Westminster Hospital. Indeed, already work had begun on the construction of a new hospital in Chelsea. Barrie envisaged a resultant struggle between his fellow paediatricians as to who would take the helm of the newly-created department. He resigned from NHS paediatrics and immersed himself in a busy schedule of private paediatrics, examining for both the medical students "finals" and the Royal College of Physicians and sitting on the Vaccine Damage Tribunal.

He was an original member of the British Paediatric Association which was to become the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. He was a founder member of both the Neonatal Society and the British Association of Perinatal Medicine. He was also the author of over one hundred scientific papers on general and neonatal paediatrics, especially in connection with resuscitation of the newborn.

In retirement he continued to play tennis twice weekly into his mid-eighties. He also joined Victim Support and became a volunteer at the local police station.

Many of Herbert Barrie's patients became friends for life. He always looked for the best in people and he invariably found it – even where others may have failed.

He is survived by his wife, Dinah, and by their son and daughter.

Dr Herbert Barrie, born October 9 1927, died March 20 2017

ref: 29.4.17