

OBITUARY



Dame Josephine Barnes 1912–1999

Dame Josephine Barnes, DBE, FRCP, FRCS, FRCOG, FFFP, died on 28th December 1999, aged 87. She was born on 18th August 1912. Her long life spanned many medical advances, but we will always remember her unique and significant contribution to women's health, family planning and reproductive health, the medico-legal aspects of our profession and not least her steadfast determination to develop the role of women in medicine.

She inherited her commitment and determination to succeed from her Yorkshire parents - her father was a Methodist Minister and her mother a talented pianist. Born in a boarding house at Sheringham, Norfolk, she moved from parish to parish with her four younger siblings. In 1921 she was in Oxford and went to school there, developing her talents in academic studies and music. It was here that her curiosity in biology developed and continued throughout her life, with a focused mind on medicine. She went to Lady Margaret Hall and was one of five women reading medicine that year, gaining a first in physiology. She

then won the Goldschmid Scholarship to University College Hospital, London, and qualified in 1937. Music and art continued to play an important part throughout her life.

After qualifying, she specialised in obstetrics and gynaecology, and in 1939 she was invited to join the staff at the Samaritan Hospital, to fill in for surgeons who had been called up. During the war, the hospital had to move to Hammersmith to avoid the 'target of Marylebone' - the move took only one day. Following this move, during that evening, she delivered a baby on the floor of Queen Charlotte's Hospital by the light of a hurricane lamp.

In 1942 she married Brian Warren, a young lieutenant in the RAMC and as he was due to leave for overseas service, they started a family straight away. In all she had three children, but made it clear that she would, in addition, continue to work, as she did not wish to waste 'her marvellous training'.

Moving to Belgravia after the war, they restored a near derelict building. She continued to run her own heavy work schedule and was often seen driving at alarming speed in an open top sports car around her various London clinics and hospitals.

Her reputation grew. Her first consultant post was at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital from 1945 until her retirement in 1977. In 1954 she was appointed to Charing Cross Hospital, as the first female consultant gynaecologist. As always, she was efficient and punctual, with an openness and a desire to share information with patients, which at this time not all doctors aspired to.

Throughout her life she championed the cause of women and sat on many national committees including pain free labour (1947), the Lane Committee (1971 - 1973), and the Warnock Committee (1981). She still found time within her busy life to contribute in many other ways, which included the Medical Defence Union, being its President in 1966. Other Presidencies included the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign (1974 - 1995), although she continued to smoke - but using a cigarette holder.

She was elected Vice-President of the RCOG (1974 - 1975), and then President of the BMA (1979 - 1980).

With these interests, it is not surprising that her contribution to family planning and reproductive health care, the National Association of Family Planning Doctors and then the Faculty and the National Association of Family Planning Nurses (now NANCASH), was highly significant and fundamental to our development. She was elected a Fellow of the Faculty in 1994 and became Foundation President of NANCASH in 1980.

'Dame Jo', as we always will remember her, never took her Presidencies or involvement lightly, attending all the meetings, contributing widely and always having time to discuss issues of the moment. She was a superb listener with an ability to 'hone down' to the crucial issues, often suggesting ways to progress our important specialty.

She was a keen traveller, extensively well-read and had a passionate belief in self-education, often adding on a holiday to a conference to learn more about that country and its people. She investigated medical facilities in countries as widespread as Russia, the Middle East and Nigeria.

She was appointed DBE in 1974, Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in 1977 and Fellow of the Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care in 1994. In November 1999, she was awarded an Honorary DSc from London University. Sadly she did not live to attend the award ceremony.

'Dame Jo' gave much of that precious commodity 'time' to others. She had a particular affection for our specialty and its multi-disciplinary approach with doctors and nurses. It is with great affection that we will remember her smile, humour, dedication and friendship. A great lady with modesty and that rare gift of the 'common touch' that reached out to patients and colleagues alike, but above all to all women, whatever their role in society.

John Newton
3rd March, 2000