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Obituary

DR VINCENT C. BARRY
D.Sc., Sc.D.(Hon.), M.Sc.

With the death of Dr Barry on 4 September, 1975, the world of chemotherapeutic research has lost one of its most brilliant intellects, and leprosy sufferers will mourn a real benefactor.

Vincent Barry was born in Cork (Eire) in 1908. Twenty years later, he graduated in chemistry from University College, Dublin, gaining first place. A year later, he obtained the degree of M.Sc., and 10 years later—as assistant to the Professor of Chemistry at University College, Galway—his doctorate in chemistry.

In 1941, Dr Barry was awarded a research fellowship in organic chemistry tenable at the newly-created Laboratories of the Medical Research Council of Ireland, with a special remit of the investigation into the chemotherapy of

tuberculosis. In the course of the next few years Barry, together with the brilliant colleagues he gathered round him (notably Dr M. L. Conalty and the 2 others who had all been working with him for more than 25 years), synthesized numerous compounds and tested them *in vitro* and *in vivo* for their antimycobacterial activity.

Barry "came into leprosy" with the synthesis of compound B283, which was shown to be active against the disease in a small series of cases in Eastern Nigeria. From 1950 onwards, in the more adequate laboratory facilities made available to him and his team at Trinity College, Dublin, Barry embarked on a most fruitful period, during which his flair for research and his monumental knowledge of his own field of synthetic chemistry resulted in the production of scores of compounds based on the rimino-phenazine nucleus. In 1957, a compound known as B663 was developed in this series. It showed remarkable properties of causal prophylaxis in experimental mouse tuberculosis. Even more interesting—from the standpoint of its eventual use in leprosy—was its concentration in macrophages. It was this property that attracted the attention of R. G. Cochrane and then of S. G. Browne.

During discussions on its antimycobacterial properties, Barry said, "B663 is tailor-made for leprosy—it goes where the bacilli are. To judge by its action in the mouse, it should stop your bacilli multiplying. Why not try it on patients?"

After going into the excellent work on animal toxicity tests, drug concentration in tissues, long term absence of carcinogenicity, and dose levels, Cochrane and Browne agreed that it was justifiable to use the drug on human volunteers in the Uzuakoli Leprosy Research Unit, Eastern Nigeria. The rest is a matter of history. With Hogerzeil as co-worker, Browne was able to report on the mycobacteriostatic, and then the anti-inflammatory properties of B663. The manufacturers were persuaded to make a further quantity of the drug for investigative purposes. And now, clofazimine (Lamprene, Geigy) is acknowledged to be an excellent leprostatic drug, with definite indications in lepromatous leprosy.

Not content with synthesizing B663, Barry and his team went on to develop new rimino-phenazine compounds, one of which—B1912—promises well in basic experimental work, and should be less expensive to manufacture on a commercial scale.

The team also became interested in the chemotherapy of neoplastic disease, making several important contributions to research in this field. In 1968, Barry's work was honoured by the award of the Boyle Medal for "exceptional merit in the domain of pure science". In his Boyle Lecture, he traces the fascinating development of his saga of synthetic chemistry, culminating in the production of B663 and B1912.

Once Barry had become attracted to leprosy, and involved in the drug trials of B663, his interest never flagged. He became a member of the International Leprosy Association and attended the Congresses in London and Bergen. His genial presence and broad Irish brogue endeared him to many who were seeing the clinical results accruing from the use of the compound that he had synthesized in Dublin years before.

We salute a good man whose brilliant researches have brought new hope to many sufferers from the most distressing forms of leprosy. And we express our condolences to his widow and their 6 children.

S. G. BROWNE