

Joseph S. Barr

Joseph S. Barr (1901-1964) was born near Wellsville, Ohio, and graduated from the College of Wooster in 1922. He received his medical degree from Harvard Medical School in 1926. Dr. Barr undertook a surgical internship at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital under Harvey Cushing, and then studied orthopedics in the Children's Hospital-Massachusetts General Hospital residency program. After finishing his training, Dr. Barr began a private practice with Dr. Frank R. Ober, a professor of orthopedic surgery at Harvard Medical School; this association lasted until 1958.

Dr. Barr had a distinguished career as well in the United States Navy. While on active duty from December 1941 to March 1946, Dr. Barr was active in the development of the Audiovisual Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, and served as the chief of Orthopedics at the Bethesda Naval Hospital and a close advisor to the Surgeon General of the Navy. For many years after his discharge, he continued his service by participating on the National Naval Medical Advisory Committee, and writing several articles on military medicine, including one on blast injury.

Upon returning after World War II in 1947, Dr. Barr succeeded Dr. Marius N. Smith-Peterson as the chief of orthopedic surgery at the Massachusetts General Hospital, having become a member of the staff in 1930. As chief, he was instrumental in the creation of the Orthopedic Research Laboratories. Also, from 1948 to 1964, he served as the John B. and Buckminster Brown Clinical Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at Harvard Medical School. Additionally, Dr. Barr was a consultant to the division of handicapped children's services in the Vermont Poliomyelitis Clinics for more than 30 years, and the surgeon-in-chief at one point of the New England Peabody Home for Crippled Children.

Throughout his career, Dr. Barr researched extensively and published articles and books about such key medical issues as intervertebral disc syndrome, poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, and scoliosis. In 1955, he became a founder of the Orthopedic Research and Education Foundation, of which he served as president from 1959 to 1961. Other medical associations he was involved with include the: Shriners' Hospital Medical Advisory Board; Board of the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery; International Society of Orthopedic Surgery and Traumatology; American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (he was one of the founding members in 1934 and its president from 1951 to 1952). Dr. Barr also served for many years as a senior medical consultant to both the Chelsea Naval Hospital and the Boston Veterans Hospital in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

The purpose of the Joseph S. Barr Memorial Fund at the MGH is to: one, strengthen resident training; and two, help finance the orthopedic operating room suite.

"We need scarcely to be reminded that every surgical operation is an experiment in which many variable factors are present, most of them not under the control of the surgeon... We recognize that the outcome in an individual case is not accurately predictable and that chance plays a role in determining the result... We must use every means at our disposal to lessen the peril of the surgical experiment."- Joseph S. Barr in 1952 speaking to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons in his presidential address.

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