

## OBITUARY

### Jose Barba Rubio

#### 1914–1999



Dr. Jose Barba Rubio, a leading leprologist in México, passed away in Guadalajara City, Mexico, 4 May 1999. He was born on 20 January 1914 in Valle de Guadalupe, Jalisco, and raised in Guadalajara. He did his medical studies in Mexico City at the School of Medicine of the National University of Mexico. From that school he obtained his M.D. degree in 1942. As a graduate, he worked at the General Hospital of the Public Health Service in Mexico under the direction of Dr. Fernando Latapi. It was with him that he learned dermatology and became interested in the study of Hansen's disease and in leprosy patients.

In 1946 with a fellowship from the Public Health Service of Mexico, he traveled to Brazil and Argentina where he met the most distinguished dermatologists of his time and studied with them the diagnosis, treatment and care of leprosy patients. Once back in his native Guadalajara he founded the Institute of Dermatology for the treatment of skin diseases, mainly patients with Hansen's disease. He was chairman and director of this Institute for more than 50 years. It was there that he made some important contributions on dermatology, among them the use of thalidomide in the treatment of discoid lupus erythematosus and other skin diseases produced or aggravated by exposure to the sun. He also made important observations on the epidemiology of sporotrichosis in the Mexican state of Jalisco. As a dean of the University of Guadalajara he promoted and established postgraduate studies in dermatology.

But it was mainly in two aspects where the professional activity of Professor Barba Rubio were particularly important for his

country. One of them was the teaching of dermatology; when he started his work at Guadalajara, he was the only physician with dermatological training in the city. Once the Institute of Dermatology started, one of his main interests was to establish a residence-training program to introduce young physicians to the field of dermatology. At present, most of the dermatologists who work in Guadalajara have obtained their instruction at the Institute. His other major contribution was his indefatigable efforts to overcome the existing prejudice concerning Hansen's disease. If at this moment the patient with leprosy still is discriminated against at the time he started to work those prejudices were worse and more widespread, not only in the general population but even among medical people. Thanks to his commitment, leprosariums were closed in the state of Jalisco, a census of leprosy patients was done, and when a patient with Hansen's disease needed to be hospitalized, he persuaded medical authorities to accept these patients in the hospitals of the Public Health Service, and taught them that leprosy should be considered a chronic skin disease, with a very low degree of contagiousness.

Among the numerous distinctions he received during his life are the following: in 1963 he was named Comendador de la Orden de San Damián in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. In 1979 in New Orleans, The International Society of Tropical Diseases bestowed upon him the Castellani-Reiss Award. The government of the state of Jalisco offered him in 1991 the Premio Jalisco (the Jalisco Award) and, in 1993, the Mexican government presented him the Eduardo Liceaga Gold Medal for all of his medical achievements during 50 years of uninterrupted work.

Dr. Jose Barba Rubio started his medical practice when penicillin was introduced in therapeutics. During more than 50 years of

continuous work he saw the amazing changes that have occurred in medical knowledge. He always recognized the important items in medical research, but did not always accept them just for the fact of their being a novelty. He was a kind and generous man and treated all patients with the same love and care, independently of their wealth or social status. As a distinguished dermatologist in Guadalajara he was sought by rich and important people, and he treated all of them with the same

care and compassion he showed for the peasant, the worker, or those who had nothing. A man of conviction and of strong character, he ruled the Institute of Dermatology for more than 50 years; one week before his death and at 85 years of age he was still at his desk performing his duties. His memory will long remain among his pupils, friends, and colleagues.

—Amado Gonzalez Mendoza, M.D.  
Mary Fafutis Morris, Ph.D.