

Introduction to “Synovitis – an inflammation of joints destroying the bone”

Costantino Pitzalis^a, Douglas Veale^b, Jean-Michel Dayer^c

^a Centre for Experimental Medicine and Rheumatology, William Harvey Research Institute, London, UK

^b School of Medicine and Medical Science, Health Sciences Centre, Belfield, Dublin, Ireland

^c Faculty of Medicine, Centre médical universitaire (CMU), Genève, Switzerland

The Barry Bresnihan Memorial Lecture was given on the 7th September 2011 during the Oliver Bird Rheumatism Programme Annual Student Conference at the invitation of the Programme Coordinators and the Nuffield Foundation to honour the memory of Prof Barry Bresnihan (1944–2010).

Prof Bresnihan was invited by the Nuffield Trustees in 2003 to be one of their three overseas advisers during the selection process to host OBRP Centres with the goal of creating five Centres of excellence in the UK to train a cohort of 50 young scientists over a 10 year period.

Prof Bresnihan was an outstanding figure in the field of Rheumatology. He graduated from University College Dublin in 1968 with an Honours degree, in addition to his academic achievements as an undergraduate, he also represented his country in rugby and in fact, represented his country on the British and Irish Lions Rugby team in 1966 and 1968. His academic career was remarkable. After he left Dublin and completed his internship at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, he was an assistant lecturer in Middlesex Hospital in London and he trained at the Hammersmith Hospital, Guy's Hospital and the MRC Rheumatism Research Unit in Taplow with Prof Barbara Ansell. He completed his training as a research fellow in the University of Texas, South Western Medical School, Dallas under the tutelage of Prof Morris Ziff.

Prof Bresnihan obtained distinctions both at an undergraduate level and as a postgraduate in his training as a rheumatologist from the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council in the form of a research fellowship and from the British Society for Rheumatology, he was awarded the Margaret Holroyd Prize two years in succession (1977 and 1978).

He obtained his membership of the Royal College of Physicians and an MD from UCD in 1978 based on his research achievements. He was inducted as a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in London, Ireland and subsequently in Edinburgh. He took up a staff appointment in St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin in 1978 and over the ensuing 30 years, he developed the St Vincent's University Hospital Rheumatology Unit into the foremost academic

rheumatology unit in Ireland and indeed, one of the foremost in Europe.

He spent two sabbaticals. One in the Pasteur Institute in Paris in 1992 and the second in the University Hospital, Geneva with Prof Jean Michel Dayer in 1999. Prof Bresnihan was recognised for his contribution to the British Society for Rheumatology when he was asked to give the Herberden Round in 1986 and he was asked to give the Graves Lecture in 1987 by the Academy of Medicine/Health Research Board of Ireland. His international prowess is best exemplified by his service to the British Society for Rheumatology advising on the creation of the BSR Biologics Register and to the Arthritis Research Campaign where he has chaired a number of academic committees.

He founded Arthritis Ireland in 1980 and in 2003 as Chairman, undertook a major initiative to re-energise this organisation, which has led to the foundation of the first fully endowed Chairs of rheumatology in the Republic of Ireland. Prof Bresnihan sat on the editorial boards of the top rheumatology journals and was an invited speaker or visiting Professor many times over the last thirty years. As a Professor of Rheumatology, he supervised six MD fellows, six PhD fellows and two MSc students. His original publications amount to over 200 excluding editorials, reviews, chapters and books.

His outstanding contribution to Rheumatology were recognised by the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) and he was named a Master in 2009.

Prof Bresnihan's wisdom, knowledge, mentoring of all participants and support for the Nuffield Foundation and the programme was invaluable. Most of Prof Bresnihan life's work was dedicated to understanding the immunopathology of rheumatoid arthritis and in particular, the study of the synovial membrane the key organ involved in causing structural damage through the activation of osteoclasts.

It was for this reason that the Nuffield Foundation and the OBRP Coordinators Committee unanimously decided to ask Prof Georg Schett, a world expert in the mechanism of joint destruction, to give the Barry Bresnihan Memorial Lecture [1].

Correspondence: Professor Jean-Michel Dayer, MD, Faculty of Medicine, Centre médical universitaire (CMU), 1 rue Michel-Servet, CH-1211 Genève 4, Switzerland, [jean-michel.dayer\[at\]unige.ch](mailto:jean-michel.dayer[at]unige.ch)

Reference

- 1 Schett G. Synovitis – an inflammation of joints destroying the bone. [Swiss Med Wkly. 2012;142:w13692.](#)