

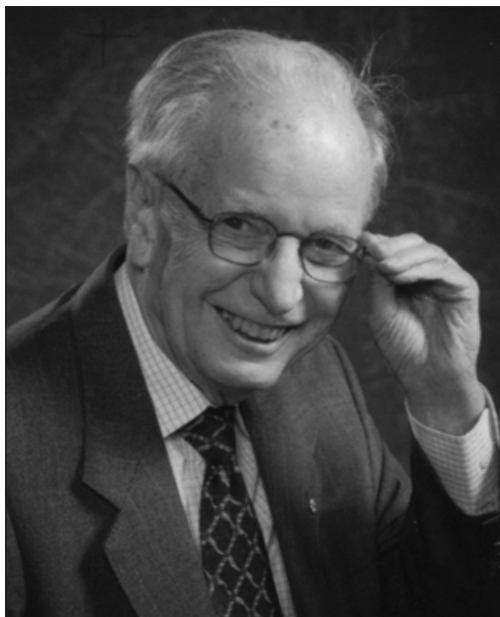
Donald W. Baxter (1926-2012)

Donald W. Baxter, O.C., M.Sc., M.D., F.R.C.P.(C), a Senior Member of the Canadian Neurological Society, died at the Montreal General Hospital (MGH) on July 24, 2012. Don was born on the 24th of August, 1926 in Brockville, Ontario and grew up in Colborne where his father, William Baxter, was Principal of the high school. The previous four generations of the Baxter family had been farmers in Leeds County, the first being William Baxter, a United Empire Loyalist who was born in the state of New York.

As a 1943 high school graduate in the midst of World War II, Don was eager to join the Canadian Army. Rejected by recruiters in Kingston, Ontario, he persisted and was able to enlist in Toronto. After basic training at an Army base in Ontario, he was sent to Kentville, Nova Scotia where he remained until the end of the war.

After the war, Don began his medical studies at Queen's University, from which he graduated with his M.D. in 1951. Following internship at the Kingston General Hospital, he spent a year as a research fellow in Neuroanatomy with Dr. Jerzy Olszewski at the Montreal Neurological Institute (MNI). During that time, he and Dr. Olszewski produced the classic atlas on the microscopic anatomy of the brain-stem¹. After more than 60 years, this book, which was Don Baxter's first scientific publication, is still an important atlas, particularly in stereotaxic neurosurgery.

On his return to clinical medicine, Don did residencies in Medicine at the Kingston General Hospital, and in Neuropathology (Joseph Foley) and Neurology (Derek Denny-Brown) at the Boston City Hospital. In 1957, he joined the Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon where his colleagues included William Feindel, Joseph Stratford, Jerzy Olszewski and Allan Bailey. This was an exciting time in that province that culminated in the introduction of Medicare by the Tommy Douglas government. When the Saskatoon group of neurologists, neurosurgeons and neuropathologists dispersed in 1961, Don moved to Philadelphia as an Associate Professor of Neurology at Temple University. In 1963, he was recruited to the Montreal General Hospital as Director of the Division of Neurology (rejoining Joe Stratford² who had been appointed Director of the Division of Neurosurgery in 1962) and as an Associate Professor in the Departments of Neurology and Neurosurgery, and of Medicine at McGill University. He was promoted to Professor in 1972.



Don Baxter came to the Montreal General with a vision³ of creating a team of physician scientists and over the next ten years carefully assembled a uniquely collegial research and clinical group, all of whom owe a substantial part of their subsequent success to his insistence on the protection of their research time in their early careers. This was made possible by his willingness to assume a large part of the clinical duties of the division. Over the years his relationship with these early recruits evolved from that of mentor to one of loyal and treasured friend. A major legacy of his time at the MGH is the continued collaborative ethos of the Division of Neurology at that institution.

In 1979, Don Baxter moved to the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital as Neurologist-in-Chief and Chairman of the McGill Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery. Five years later, he became Director of the MNI and held this position until 1992, serving again as Interim Director of the Institute from 2000-2002.

During his first year as MNI Director, Don streamlined the administration of the Institute and Hospital by establishing a governance model with clear lines of responsibility for research, teaching and clinical care activities. An Advisory Board, composed of representatives appointed by the Principal of McGill University and elected by the MNI staff, was created. Don practiced a consultative and collaborative leadership style, important examples of which were his monthly meetings with the coordinators of the disease-oriented research teams to seek their advice on research priorities, recruitment and the allocation of Institute funds and his weekly meetings with the Liaison Committee that coordinated activities of the Institute and Hospital.

As Director, Don Baxter recognized, and committed the necessary resources to support, new areas of endeavour such as neuroimmunology and neurogenetics while strengthening the MNI's historic areas of excellence in neuropsychology, epileptology, muscle diseases and imaging. He also stressed the importance of excellence in appointing new staff. During his tenure, some 20 investigators were recruited, several of whom have become recognized authorities in their fields either at the MNI or elsewhere. Although Don would be the first to acknowledge the roles that others played in attracting these researchers, he certainly deserves credit for recognizing their potential and committing the MNI resources to facilitate their recruitment. The increase in annual peer-reviewed research

funding from \$2.9 million in 1984 to \$7 million in 1992 is tangible evidence of his wise stewardship of the Institute's resources.

During Don's eight years as MNI Director, there were major improvements in the MNI/MNH facilities. The Webster Pavilion, including the 350-seat Jeanne Timmins Amphitheatre, was completed. New laboratories were built and others remodelled, the neuroimaging facilities were upgraded, a new library was established, and epilepsy-monitoring and clinical research units were created. The Director's Reports⁴ also document the many challenges that he and the Institute had to confront. These included government-imposed reductions in funding and numbers of resident positions. He repeatedly stressed the need for a stronger endowment base to provide the resources that would both maintain the Institute/Hospital and support the important advances in neuroscience that would lead to better care for those with disorders of the nervous system. To this end, the MNI embarked on a capital campaign that, as his retirement as Director approached in 1991, was successful in raising \$17.2 million. As summarized in a tribute by one of Don's former faculty members, "Having guided the MNI into the modern era of neurological care and science, and having stabilized and improved its finances, Don knew when to pass the mantle on to the next generation".

Donald Baxter was also an important figure in Canadian neurology. He was President of the Canadian Neurological Society from 1969-1970 and Chair of the policy-making Royal College Committee on Neurology from 1970-1975. In addition to his profound influence on the faculty members that he recruited, he was revered by a generation of McGill neurology trainees who universally regarded him as a clinician to be emulated. More than simply an outstanding clinician, he was always a source of wise, thoughtful and understated counsel clothed in a character of self-deprecating humor and absolute integrity.

Dr. Baxter's contributions to McGill and to the MNI were acknowledged by his promotion to Professor Emeritus in 1992 and by the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Montreal

Neurological Institute in 2005. He was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1996. His important role in supporting and nurturing the inter-hospital McGill Neurology Residency program, particularly during his five years as Chairman of the McGill Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery, is recognized by the annual Donald Baxter lecture that was established by the Department in 1998.

Don enjoyed many happy years after his marriage to Anne Bieler, who remained his loving and devoted wife throughout the difficult weeks of his final illness. He is also survived by his son Jonathan, and daughter Nicola.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several of Don Baxter's colleagues contributed to this memorial tribute. Sandra McPherson, Ph.D., Communications Director, kindly arranged access to the Annual Reports of the MNI/MNH.

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