



Editorial

Professor Claudine Blanchet-Bardon: French dermatologist and leading authority on inherited ichthyoses☆

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ABSTRACT

This article recounts the early life and professional achievements through 2016 of Professor Claudine Blanchet-Bardon, a French dermatologist who is known for her work in dermatogenetics, genetic counseling, and the care of patients with ichthyoses among other important work.

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Introduction

Prof. Claudine Blanchet-Bardon (Fig. 1) is a world-renowned French dermatologist, best known for her extensive research on inherited ichthyoses as well as other genodermatoses and their pre-natal diagnosis. This article will explore her main contributions to the field.

Personal life

Claudine Marie France Bardon was born after WWII in April 1947 in Brest, France to a Catholic family. Her maternal grandparents had a holiday home in Brest, a city that had been badly damaged during the war but where it was easier to survive than Paris. Her paternal grandfather served as a local chief in Normandy for the French Resistance movement against the German Occupation. Ms. Bardon spent her summers with a German family from the age of 10 until 22, resulting in her becoming bilingual.

Her father, Jean Bardon, was a physician so Ms. Bardon became familiar with medicine from a relative early age. He practiced part-time in the area hospital and part-time ran a private practice from the family home so Ms. Bardon became accustomed to patient

contact. Between the ages of 11 and 15, she was educated at the College Anatole Le Braz, in Brittany, northwest France. She was the only girl at the college and her father had fought hard to get her accepted to attend. Her education there was excellent and she learned to integrate into a predominantly male environment. Between the ages of 15 and 17, Ms. Bardon subsequently attended the Lycee Ernest Renan in Brittany where she found that surviving in an all-female institution was more of a struggle.

At the age of 22, Ms. Bardon married Bernard Blanchet. He was a fellow medical student at the Université de Rennes who studied obstetrics and gynecology. Their son was born on April 2, 1972, and she was glad she had a child at an early age because she was in good shape to have the “thousand arms” it required to juggle all her commitments. Although Mr. Blanchet was supportive of her studies, they later divorced. In 1979, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon met Mr. Marvin Lutzner, a professor of dermatology, while attending an electron microscopy course in Barcelona, Spain. He was on sabbatical leave in France from his position as the head of the Dermatology Branch of the National Institute of Health in the United States. They married in 1984 and Mr. Lutzner never returned to the United States. His main accomplishments include the discovery that skin cancers in transplant patients are related to an infection with the human papilloma virus. Prof. Blanchet-Bardon and Mr. Lutzner eventually divorced after many years of a happy marriage.

Prof. Blanchet-Bardon's hobbies include cooking and collecting cooking books. She also has an extensive taxidermy collection as a result of her interest in the skin of animals and has helped curate her husband's museum on the subject.

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Figure 1. Professor Claudine Blanchet-Bardon. http://weill-raynal.typepad.fr/photos/instantans_de_campagne/claudine2.html By Stephen Rees, Accessed 4 October 2016.

Professional life

Prof. Blanchet-Bardon received her Bachelor's Degree in 1964 at the age of 17. She initially went to the provincial Université de Rennes in Brittany to study medicine. She took the Concours and achieved the Internat des Hôpitaux with a 27th place out of 600 students. Only the top 37 students were awarded the Internat des Hôpitaux, which conferred the right to select the most prestigious hospitals and universities to attend along with a stipend. Thus, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon was allowed to work at the prestigious Université Paris Descartes, where she became an intern in 1971. Only interns were eligible to apply for academic positions and become specialists. Prof. Blanchet-Bardon was the first female student from Rennes to achieve an Internat des Hôpitaux de Paris and was therefore invited to share tips with other female students on how to succeed in a predominantly male environment. Although she was pregnant when she commenced her internship, her husband at the time encouraged her to take the opportunity, for which she remains grateful.

In Paris, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon initially hoped to train as a surgeon but her small stature was an impediment. Therefore, she entered the departments of dermato-venerology and general pathology and earned specialist certifications in 1976 and 1974, respectively. Since specialists were obligated to practice only one specialty, she subsequently decided to work exclusively in dermato-venerology. While waiting for a suitable position as a Chief of Clinic to become available, she applied for research grants and subsequently became the first French physician (and only dermatologist for several decades as well as one of only a few women at that time) to win the prestigious Von Humboldt research grant, a German research prize fund open to all scientists for which she faced stiff competition. Using her language skills and connections in Germany, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon travelled to Heidelberg to work with Prof. Ingrid Anton-Lamprecht, a female botanist who was working in the dermatology department of Prof. Urs Walter Schnyder as an electron microscopist with a focus on genodermatoses. Here, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon developed her life-long interest in the genodermatoses under the auspices and tutelage

of Prof. Anton-Lamprecht. She remains grateful for the education and support that Prof. Anton-Lamprecht provided her over those years.

During her studies, Prof. Schnyder asked her to investigate whether etretinate modified the cellular defects that were seen in genodermatoses. Prof. Blanchet-Bardon went on to show that the retinoid drug decreased the number of keratinocytes and abnormal tonofilaments in a patient with congenital bullous ichthyosiform erythroderma.

For the majority of her remaining career, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon worked within the dermatology department at the Hôpital St Louis in Paris (Fig. 2). Upon her return to Paris, she set up a practice using her experience in genodermatoses, electron microscopy, and etretinate. She obtained a supply of the retinoid drug from Roche in Paris and started using it to treat patients. Within a year, she had established a formal clinic to treat genodermatoses and was attracting patients internationally. Prof. Blanchet-Bardon always worked within the public health system and never took up private practice. Remaining within hospital-based dermatology and only charging those fees that were mandated by the French social security health insurance system placed her among a minority of dermatologists within Paris. She never had an interest in charging for consultations and campaigned strongly for social security to support patients (particularly those with genodermatoses) while helping them set up patient support groups in the 1980s. In 1977, she helped establish the Centre for the Study and Treatment of Genetic Skin Diseases and was eventually promoted to the head position in 1990, making her the first female to ever hold this role. She was also officially put in charge of the Government's Laboratoire de Référence Genodermatoses in 2005 by President Jacques Chirac.

In 1980, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon was approached by an obstetrician, Yves Dumez, to discuss the issue of prenatal diagnosis. He had already succeeded in withdrawing blood from the umbilical cord and managed to provide skin samples, which allowed Prof. Blanchet-Bardon to make the first recorded prenatal diagnosis of Harlequin ichthyosis in 1982 using electron microscopy. She first published her research findings in 1983 (Blanchet-Bardon et al., 1983) and received the Bronze Medal from the American Academy of Dermatology for this work. She subsequently worked with others, including Charles Rodeck, to advance this field of medicine. As a Catholic and as a physician with a close relationship to her patients, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon helped counsel families through this difficult area, explaining that prenatal diagnosis could allow them to have healthy children. She received assistance from religious leaders, including Rabbis and the Imam of the Paris mosque (who was also a cardiologist) in counseling her patients. This research was pivotal in allowing parents to make informed choices about whether to continue an affected pregnancy. Prof. Blanchet-Bardon would later publish review articles on genetic counseling in dermatology and her personal experience on the subject (Blanchet-Bardon and Nazzaro, 1987). In 1984, she was appointed by the French government as the Director for the National Laboratory of Prenatal diagnosis.

In 1985, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon was elected to the Board of the French Society of Dermatology, on which she served for 16 years including 4 years as treasurer in the 1990s. While working with the French Union of Dermatologists, she joined scientific societies, helped with multiple annual meetings, and was instrumental in the installation of a system of speaker evaluation at the end of sessions. She has chaired countless meetings, presented posters, and accepted invitations from many conferences, lecturing in French, German, and English.

In 1992, Prof. Blanchet-Bardon was awarded a professorship, an accolade which greatly forwarded her work, reputation, and the glory of her department. However, she had to fight for the honor and found some barriers were erected after her distinction but she continued undeterred. Her work in prenatal diagnosis earned her

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