

Dr Efstathios “Staff” Barootes

The CUA is currently embarking on an important initiative in the realm of advocacy. This will undoubtedly involve rubbing shoulders with politicians to advance the care of our patients and represent the relevance of our specialty in the Canadian medical context. One of our unsung heroes was in fact a prominent politician and his contributions are worth remembering.

Dr Efstathios (“Staff”) Barootes (November 15, 1918 - July 30, 2000) was born to a Greek immigrant family in Winnipeg and then moved with his family to Saskatoon. He obtained a BA from the University of Saskatchewan in 1940 and then followed this with his MD degree in 1943 from the University of Toronto. He served his country in WW II as an officer in the Toronto Scottish Regiment of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. After the war he undertook post-graduate training in Urology. He relocated to Regina and practiced in that city until he retired from Urology in 1979.

During his career, Barootes was politically active. He served as a member of the Thompson Committee in Saskatchewan, which in 1961 recommended that health services be designed in a coordinated way, that physicians be paid on a fee for service basis, that very modest user fees be instituted, and that the plan be administered by an independent commission. This proposal was not followed however, as the CCF government of Tommy Douglas passed the Saskatchewan Medical Insurance Act (“Medicare”) on November 17, 1961. Barootes was then President of the Saskatchewan Medical Association and presided over a 23-day doctor’s strike, which was staged in response to the aforementioned Medicare act. He eventually became Treasurer of the CMA as he had acknowledged financial expertise. He received the Medal of Service from the CMA for his contributions. Staff also served as president of the Medical Council of Canada from 1972-1973.

In 1984 he stepped up to the big leagues and came out of retirement to accept an appointment by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to the Canadian Senate, representing the district of Regina-Qu’Appelle. He stepped down from the Senate when he turned 75 years of age in 1993.

Staff Barootes demonstrated that one can serve two masters - medicine and politics. He was initially opposed to Medicare, as he feared doctors would be conscripted to civil service. In an article written in 1991 he stated his fears had been unfounded and that the sacred doctor-patient relationship and professional self-government had not been adversely affected by socialized medicine. Based on the bitter experience of the doctors’ strike, he also recommended that health professions should be forbidden to strike by law and that binding arbitration should be used instead. He should serve as an example

as to how politically interested urologists can engage and help shape the delivery of care.