



The news of the sudden death of Professor Barbara Starfield, apparently due to a coronary event while swimming at her California home on Friday, 10 June 2011, came as a shock. Her passing is an irreplaceable loss for those of us in the global community who care deeply about health care and equity.

A pediatrician by training, health services researcher by trade, and natural teacher by talent, Dr. Starfield was University Distinguished Service Professor at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health and School of Medicine, as well as Director of its Primary Care Policy Center. She spent more than 50 years at Johns Hopkins.

Barbara was a tireless advocate for family medicine and primary care. She reminded us of why we chose to become family doctors – to help people, improve health, and make the world a better and fairer place.

Using detailed data and compelling analysis, she taught us things about ourselves that we believed, but did not know for certain. She opened the eyes of family doctors to the considerable abilities we have, the weighty responsibilities we carry, and the unrealized possibilities we represent. She saw family doctors as the best hope for health care. Many times, she challenged our vision of what family medicine should look like, and nudged us to see further and clearer.

Barbara had an amazing zest for life, traveling constantly around the globe to share ideas, nurture young professionals, and push leaders to do better. A typical day for her could include a meeting with a Health Minister, a tutorial with students, a speech to thousands, completion of yet another manuscript, and an idea for a new tool to further prove the value of primary care. She will be remembered for her passion for social justice, incisive intelligence, and incredible energy.

Great people have an extraordinary vitality, which makes them seem immortal and lulls us into thinking we will have them forever. And then they are gone. The best tribute we can offer Barbara is to continue to work toward her vision of a world in which everyone has access to quality health care centered in a trusted relationship with a compassionate, competent, and comprehensive family doctor.

We have lost a giant intellect, a generous colleague, and a good friend. Our deepest sympathies go out to her husband Tony, 4 children, 8 grandchildren, and extended family.

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