Where are the women 'Heroes and Pillars of Rheumatology'?

We have enjoyed reading the 'Heroes and Pillars of Rheumatology' section of *Ann Rheum Dis* which was introduced in 2018 to highlight 'persons or scientific innovations of the past that were pivotal in advancing our discipline'.¹ While we acknowledge the recognition of Dr Barbara Ansell CBE, FRCP, FRCS, FRCPC in the June 2019 issue,² we note that the remaining 14 'Heroes' profiled to date³ have been men.

We recognise that, historically, opportunities for women in medicine were limited. However, there are many women who have made ground-breaking contributions to the field of rheumatology. Examples of past Heroes include:

- ▶ Professor Nanna Svartz (1890–1986) who discovered sulfasalazine in 1938 and demonstrated its efficacy in rheumatoid arthritis.
- ▶ Professor Gertrude Elion (1918–1999) who was awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize in medicine for her work developing drugs including allopurinol, mercaptopurine and azathioprine.
- ▶ Professor Tsai-Fan Yu (1911–2007) who undertook the first clinical trials of allopurinol, probenecid and colchicine for management of gout.
- ▶ Professor Mary Betty Stevens (d. 1994), a pioneer of the multidisciplinary team in rheumatology practice, who led research discoveries in lupus and vasculitis.
- ▶ Professor Marian Ropes (1903–1994), the first woman president of the American Rheumatism Association (in 1963), who described synovial fluid composition in rheumatoid arthritis and led early attempts to develop diagnostic criteria for rheumatoid arthritis.
- ▶ Professor Fionula Brennan (d. 2012) who described the inhibitory effect of tumour necrosis factor (TNF)-alpha antibodies on synovial inflammation in rheumatoid arthritis; work that led directly to development of anti-TNF therapy in rheumatology practice.

We also highlight the decades-long contributions of living Heroes in our field including Professors Deborah Symmons, Désirée van der Heijde, Amita Aggarwal, Ellen Ginzler, Seza Özen, Ellen Gravallese, Cornelia Weyand, Dame Carol Black, Bebra Hahn, Graciela Alarcon, Dafna Gladman, Michelle Petri, Patricia Woo, Marina Botto, Lyn March and Betty Diamond, to name but a few. Each of these women has led work that has transformed our understanding of rheumatic disease or the practice of rheumatology.

Despite increasing numbers of women in the specialist rheumatology workforce, career advancement remains slow with persistent gender inequities in promotion to senior academic and leadership positions.⁴ An ongoing challenge to women in medicine is the relative lack of senior role models. Highlighting the achievements of women 'Heroes and Pillars of Rheumatology'

provides an important opportunity to learn from those who have 'paved the roads to modern rheumatology'.⁵ We hope that the editorial leadership will take the opportunity to balance their coverage in this series.

Nicola Dalbeth ,¹ Tuhina Neogi ²

¹Department of Medicine, The University of Auckland Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Auckland, New Zealand

²Clinical Epidemiology Research and Training Unit, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Correspondence to Prof Nicola Dalbeth, Department of Medicine, The University of Auckland Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand; n.dalbeth@auckland.ac.nz

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ORCID iDs

Nicola Dalbeth <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4632-4476>

Tuhina Neogi <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9515-1711>

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