

History in Cardiology

Remembering Christiaan Barnard in Philately

Nazmul Hosain, Md. Anisuzzaman

Department of Cardiology, Chittagong Medical College, Chattagram

Abstract

Key Words :
Christiaan
Barnard,
Cardiac
transplantation,
Philately.

Christiaan Barnard is famous for his legendary operation of first ever successful human heart transplantation performed on December 3, 1967 at the Groote Schuur hospital Cape Town, South Africa. The operation captured the World public imagination as no surgical procedure had ever before or since. Christian Barnard, a little known surgeon from apartheid South Africa suddenly became the focus of media attention. The Groote Schuur team captured the headlines of the world's leading newspapers. However, forgotten are the names of those innumerable surgeons, cardiologists, basic scientists and researchers whose research works paved the pathway to transplant success. It may be difficult to estimate the level of world's interest about the action of Christiaan Barnard and his team. One example is a commemorative postal stamp published to honor him by countries from different parts of the world. They include Bhutan, St. Helena, Romania, Commonwealth of Dominica, Mozambique and Republic of Congo and others. Yemen Arab Republic printed a series of stamps honoring Dr. Christiaan Barnard. African country Guine Bissau printed a beautiful stamp and first day cover portraying Barnard and a beautiful image of a little girl on a hospital bed with the teddy bear in her arms. Latin American country Paraguay gave Dr. Barnard a distinct honor by portraying him on a series along with Reverend Martin Luther King & President John F Kennedy. Christiaan Barnard was among the most celebrity surgeons of the world. Many countries have printed commemorative stamps to respect and celebrate his achievement. Ironically, many of these countries lack even the basic cardiac surgical facilities.

(Cardiovasc j 2023; 16(1): 53-55)

Introduction

One of the most known African figures of the Twentieth Century all over the World is Dr. Christiaan Barnard. His legendary operation of first ever successful transplantation of human heart took place on 3rd December 1967. Barnard led the surgical team that performed the first human to human heart transplant at the Groote Schuur hospital Cape Town, South Africa. The operation captured the World public imagination as no surgical procedure had ever before or since. The mere idea of literally implanting some one's heart inside somebody else's chest cage sounded amazing to the general population without having the any idea of the bloody nature of the surgery & the sacrifice of the donor and the family involved. And unlike present day success in cardiac transplantation, heart transplantation in those days meant that the recipient had the same ultimate fate as the donor pretty soon almost in all the cases. Despite all these facts the World

media was excited and Christian Barnard, internationally a little known surgeon from an apartheid & mostly taboo country, suddenly became the focus of media attention of the whole World. From London Observer to New York Times, the Groote Schuur team captured the headline of the world's leading newspapers.

The first heart transplantation was neither a one day adventure nor a single man show. It was the final step of a prolonged painstaking journey involving many researchers across several countries in different continents. This is comparable with the Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon or conquering the Mount Everest by Tenzing Norgay & Sir Edmund Hillary. Both of these two events involved long standing effort and sacrifice of many ancestors, but people remember the names of only the final accomplishers. Similarly forgotten are the names of those innumerable surgeons, cardiologists, basic scientists and researchers whose research works paved the pathway to transplant success.

Address of correspondence: Dr. Nazmul Hosain. Professor of Cardiac Surgery, Chittagong Medical College & Hospital. Chattagram, Bangladesh. Email: heartsurgeon007@gmail.com

© 2023 authors; licensed and published by International Society of Cardiovascular Ultrasound, Bangladesh Chapter and Bangladesh Society of Geriatric Cardiology. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the CC BY NC 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>)

More than five decades after the event, it may be difficult to estimate the level of world's interest about the action of Christiaan Barnard and his team. This is often reflected in different means by which countries have attempted to honor Dr. Barnard. One example is a commemorative postal stamp published to honor him by Bhutan, a country far away, where forget transplant, even very primitive level of invasive cardiac care is literally non-existent. 34 years after the historic event the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan printed this postal stamp with a photograph of Dr. Barnard along with the picture of a golden colored heart portrayed on it. On the stamp is printed in capital letters 'HUMAN HEART TRANSPLANTATION' and below that is his name, Christiaan Barnard. A heart transplantation in 2001 Bhutan is even beyond the wildest imagination, but the stamp was published to respect Dr. Barnard probably just after his death. Another tiny nation St. Helena also published a stamp in same year probably also as a sign of respect almost same time. Here also printed Christiaan Barnard 1922-2001. This stamp portrays Dr. Barnard's photograph along with a picture of a heart and a snapshot from an OT. Eastern European country Romania honored Barnard by printing a postal stamp. The landscape oriented stamp portrays '1967-CHRISTIAN

BARNARD' & then in Romanian language 'PRIMA GREFA DE INIMA' which means 'First Heart Transplant'. Interestingly they have used wrong spelling of the first name of this famous surgeon as 'Christian' not 'Christiaan'.

Philately is the study of the postage stamps along with related substances and their use. Postage stamps are small pieces of special kind of paper with a national denomination and designation on the face and a gum adhesive on the reverse side, which are pasted on articles to be dispatched as a proof of payment. Postage stamps are used to pay necessary fees for moving postal items as well as registration & insurance etc. Yemen Arab Republic printed a series of stamps honoring Dr. Christiaan Barnard (Fig 2). One of the stamps features a painting figure of Dr. Barnard with his name written in English & Arabic. In another he is seen to examine a patient and in a third one an OT scenario is displayed along with a profile of Dr. Barnard although no name mentioned.

Latin American country Paraguay gave Dr. Barnard a distinct honor by portraying him on a series of 3 beautiful thematic stamps which also displayed 2 famous American leaders, namely famous US civil liberty movement leader Reverend Martin Luther King & US President John F Kennedy-both assassinated under mysterious



Fig.-1: Stamps from Bhutan, St Helena and Romania portraying Dr. Barnard.



Fig.-2. Yemen Arab Republic printed a series of stamps honoring Dr Christiaan Barnard.

circumstances (Fig 3). Enlisting Dr. Barnard at the same level with these two famous politicians shows the level of respect expressed by Paraguay to this surgeon from a far-off country.

Barnard was a source of inspiration & a sense of pride for the African nations. Another African country Guine Bissau printed a beautiful stamp and first day cover in his memory. Printed on the stamp is ‘descobertes na medicina’ which means ‘the discoverirs in medicine’. The stamp portrays Barnard and a beautiful image of a little girl on a hospital bed with the teddy bear in her arms. South African neighbour Mozambique released a beautiful set of stamps in the memory of Dr. Barnard & his achievement. 4 of the 6 stamps portray the facial profile of Dr. Barnard in different pose. The 5th one portrays Dr. Barnard along with Mr. Lewis Washansky- the first recipient. The 6th stamp shows a snapshot of an operation theater. Another African country Republic of Congo printed

a colorful postal stamp portraying the face of Barnard with an OT photo and a heart diagram on the top.

Tiny Caribbean nation Commonwealth of Dominica printed a stamp remembering Dr. Barnard. This reddish pink colored stamp portrays a profile photo of him with his name and the first heart transplant printed at the bottom.

Christiaan Barnard was among the most, if not the most celebrity cardiac surgeon of the world. He became famous forever performing the first ever human heart transplantation. Many countries have printed commemorative stamps to respect and celebrate his achievement. Ironically, many of these countries lack even the basic cardiac surgical facilities. Despite that, these countries have released philatelic materials to honor one of the most celebrity surgeons of the world, Christiaan Barnard.



Fig.-3. A series of 3 beautiful thematic stamps Paraguay including Dr. Barnard.



Fig.-4. Postal stamps from Guine-Bissau, Mozambique and Congo expressing their respect for Barnard through philately.