ALAN NABARRO, OBE

For over thirty years before his death on 22 March 1977, Alan Nabarro served the British Diabetic Association generously and wisely. Invited to join the Executive Council in 1944, he welcomed the chance of putting both his legal expertise and his personal experience of diabetes at the service of his fellow members. At a time when insurance companies still looked askance at a “diabetic risk”, Alan Nabarro fought for fair cover and fair premiums, and, by and large, he won his battles. Then, in 1953, after the sudden death of the Association’s Honorary Treasurer, Alan Nabarro stepped into the breach and assumed his responsibilities until a permanent successor could be found and in 1967 he was elected Honorary Secretary of the Association.

In 1949 Alan Nabarro was the lay representative of the BDA at the meeting in Brussels at which the international Diabetes Federation was established. He subsequently represented the United Kingdom on its Executive Board and served as Chairman of its Constitutional Committee. In recognition of his devotion to the international cause of diabetes, Alan Nabarro was elected as the first British lay Vice-President of the Federation in 1975. Alan Nabarro’s dedication to the cause of diabetes was not entirely fortuitous. In 1922 he had himself been diagnosed with diabetes and given six months to live. That he completed not merely six months but fifty-five years, was due to the discovery of insulin. It was administered to the first human patient in January 1922, the very month that seven year old Alan developed diabetes. Fifteen months later, Alan was to receive his own first injection. In the meantime however, he was kept alive on a diet devoid of sweets, cakes, bread or potatoes and with a compulsory fast of spinach and cream once a week. He was taken away from school and spent much of his time in and out of nursing homes. That he survived was thanks to the devoted attention of his mother, that he was one of the very first patients to receive insulin in this country was thanks to the persistent efforts of his father.

He did survive and after a glorious summer watching cricket at Lords, he returned to school in September 1923. His education continued at University College School, London, where he played cricket and went swimming and in the holidays played golf, tennis and later squash. In 1936 he took the degree of Batchelor of Law at London University and in the following year was admitted to the Roll of Solicitors.

Soon after came the war. Debarred from active service by his diabetes, Alan Nabarro volunteered for service as an Air Raid Warden. Again he was turned down because of his diabetes, but after an insistent appeal to the authorities he was finally accepted. During the war he was also the voluntary leader of the Victoria Boys’ Club in Whitechapel, East London. In 1940 he organised a second club for young evacuees from Gibraltar. His interest in young people remained with him throughout his life and in 1953 he became President and later Honorary Life President.

A member of the Mahamad (Executive) of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation of London and Elder of its synagogue, Alan Nabarro was unspiring in his support of voluntary work for the Jewish community. His work for the Norwood Homes for Jewish children will not quickly be forgotten.

In 1968 Alan Nabarro was awarded the OBE for his work for youth in London and in 1973 he became the first Briton to receive the Joslin Medal, awarded for fifty years triumph over diabetes.

Alan Nabarro waged a lifelong battle against discrimination against people with diabetes. His own full and active life was a shining example to thousands of his fellow men, whether living with diabetes or not, and his deep concern and compassionate understanding will remain a source of true inspiration for many years to come.