

# **Abraham Flexner Award for Distinguished Service to Medical Education**

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The Abraham Flexner Award for Distinguished Service to Medical Education was established in 1958 by the AAMC to recognize extraordinary individual contributions to medical schools and to the medical education community as a whole.

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**Winner - Howard S. Barrows, MD**  
**Director, Problem-Based Learning Initiative**  
**Professor Emeritus, Department of Medical Education**  
**Southern Illinois University School of Medicine**



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For more than 40 years, Dr. Howard Barrows has been inventing educational tools and pioneering educational methods that have in large part defined the field of medical education today. Dr. Barrows' innovations have influenced not only how modern medical education, but how education in general, is conducted.

Working in conjunction with his colleagues at McMaster University in the early 1970s, Dr. Barrows developed, and continues to disseminate, the Problem-Based Learning model. A small group, student-centered, case-based method of education, PBL is one form of an active, participatory model that has since been called for by major studies of medical education reform. Although PBL had its origins in medical education, it has since expanded to other forms of professional education across the nation.

In addition, Dr. Barrows' work in the 1960s led him to create the idea of "standardized patients." By training actors or citizens to represent medical

patients, Dr. Barrows opened the door to a broad range of opportunities for student to practice clinical skills, and for instructors to assess their students that has not previously been possible or feasible.

Through his work with patient simulation, Dr. Barrows helped give performance-based testing its start in medical education. As with the simulations themselves, performance-based testing is now common in medical education, both in the United States and throughout the world. For his groundbreaking contributions to the testing of medical students, Dr. Barrows was granted the first annual John P. Hubbard Award by the National Board of Medical Examiners in 1984.

After receiving his MD degree from the University of California School of Medicine, Dr. Barrows completed his internship and first year of a neurology residency at the Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. After spending two years as a neurologist with the Medical Corps of the United States Air Force, Dr. Barrows completed his residency at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, becoming Chief Resident in Neurology on Special Traineeship from the National Institutes of Health during his last year. A productive writer, Dr. Barrows has participated in writing over 400 journal articles as well as 19 books. He also co-founded *Teaching and Learning in Medicine: An International Journal*. For his 1994 article, "Use of Standardized Patients in Clinical Assessment," Dr. Barrows received the Award for Outstanding Research Publication from the American Education Research Association.