

ONE LIFE IN MEDICINE

António José de Barros Veloso

By

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António José de Barros Veloso was born in Coimbra in September 1930, the son of a doctor and a piano teacher. His childhood was marked by a defining event: at eight months of age, his mother contracted pulmonary tuberculosis, leading to her being admitted to the *Sanatório do Caramulo*, causing a separation between him and his mother. This circumstance would decisively influence his personal and professional trajectory.

His father regularly visited his mother at the sanatorium, and this contact resulted in his integration into the institution's clinical staff, where he would pursue his entire career.

After three years of hospitalisation, his mother was discharged, and the family, already living in Caramulo — a small village that grew up around this mountain sanatorium in the centre of Portugal — decided to settle there permanently. It was in this peculiar environment that the young António José grew up, until his studies took him to other places, while maintaining regular visits to his family. His experience there would lead, decades later, to the publication of a book dedicated to his sanatorium experience: *Caramulo: The Rise and Fall of a Tuberculosis Resort*.^[1]

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Barros Veloso delivering his speech at the Doctor Honoris Causa ceremony, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2018.

After graduating in Medicine from the University of Coimbra, he was attracted to the prestige of the *Hospitais Cívicos de Lisboa* and its *Banco* (emergency department). He thus submitted himself to the famously demanding admission examinations, succeeding well. He then progressed through his career as a specialist in Internal Medicine, culminating in the role of Director of a Medicine Department (*Medicina 1*) at the *Hospital de Santo António dos Capuchos*.

As a central figure in the development of Internal Medicine in Portugal, Barros Veloso organised several highly reputable annual courses. He founded the Portuguese Society of Internal Medicine and was the editor of its scientific journal. He was also a founding member of the *European Society of Internal Medicine*.

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He inherited his love of the piano from his mother, a talented interpreter of 19th-century classical works, because, as he stated, they were both blessed with a “musical mind.”

After retirement, he devoted himself to studying the History and Philosophy of Science, completing a master's degree at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon. This experience resulted in the publication of the book *Tycho Brahe: A Fabulous Astronomer in the Kingdom of Denmark*.^[2]



Barros Veloso performing at Távola Jazz Bar, Lisbon, September 2024.

His commitment to the History of Medicine resulted in several publications, including a landmark work: *Doctors and Society: For a History of Medicine in 20th-Century Portugal* [3], of which he is the co-author, coordinator and editor. His cultural interests expanded to the history of tile art — an artistic expression of Arab origin and of excellence in Portugal — which led him, in co-authorship with his wife, Isabel Almasqué, to publish several volumes, notably: *Hospitais Civis de Lisboa – History and Tiles* [4], dedicated to the tile heritage in those hospital buildings, many of which were former convents, some as old as the 15th century, and another entitled *Portuguese Tiles and Art Nouveau* [5], considered a groundbreaking work.

His separation from everyday clinical practice, combined with his longevity, allowed him to develop a critical appreciation of the paths of contemporary medicine, which was expressed in *Medicine and Other Things* [6]. In it, he compares the modern era to a new Renaissance, drawing fundamental parallels such as the invention of the printing press and the emergence of the internet, and between Montaigne's scepticism and current denialism regarding climate change and the supposed harmful effects of vaccines.

In recognition of his remarkable contribution to Portuguese medicine and culture, he was awarded the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* by the *Universidade Nova de Lisboa* in 2018, at the age of 88.

António José de Barros Veloso continues to write and participate in jazz jam sessions.

He is an esteemed figure in Portuguese medicine, embodying the ideal of the humanistic and versatile physician, giving full meaning to the aphorism from the nineteenth-century Spanish anatomist José de Letamendi and popularised in Portugal by Abel Salazar: “*The one who only knows about Medicine, does not even know about Medicine.*”

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