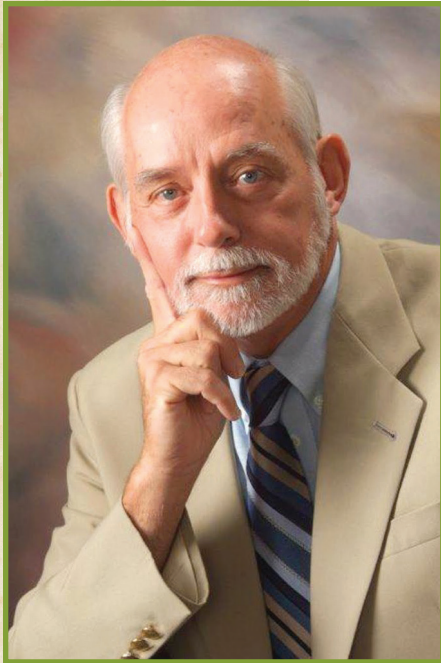


As He Enters Retirement, Russell Barkley Looks Back



Ari Tuckman, PsyD, interviews Russell Barkley, PhD

RUSSELL BARKLEY, PHD, is without a doubt the world's foremost expert in ADHD. He has been a driving force behind our current understanding of ADHD and a tireless advocate for those who have it. As he now finally approaches retirement, he leaves behind an enormous body of work that has improved the lives of everyone who has been diagnosed with ADHD. Here, he reflects on that career.

On a more personal note, I remember my first conversation with Russ at the CHADD conference in 2006. I had read a bunch of his work and seen him present, so I was more than a little starstruck when I lined up after his presentation to ask if he would be willing to consider writing an endorsement quote for my first book. He had no reason at all to know who I was, but he seemed genuinely interested in getting a review copy, just as he took the time to talk with every single person who patiently lined up in front of me. His contributions to the field have not just been intellectual, but also through these countless small gestures that meant so much to the people who were lucky enough to interact with him personally.

—Ari Tuckman, PsyD

ARI TUCKMAN: How did you choose ADHD as your topic of specialization?

RUSSELL BARKLEY: I was an undergraduate psychology student at UNC Chapel Hill and realized that to go to graduate school I needed to do more than just get good grades. So I walked around the medical school child development and rehabilitation center and offered to give ten to fifteen hours a week of my time to any researcher who needed a free research assistant. As luck would have it, I was referred to a psychologist, Donald Routh, who had just received a grant to study hyperactive children as well as their medication response. He consented to let me help with his research, shortly after which I became his honors student in psychology, did my honors thesis with him, and worked on his grant. I was fascinated by the children I observed for him. And he served as an

influential father figure to me over the next fifteen months, encouraging me to enter the field of child clinical psychology instead of developmental psychology, as I would have a better chance at employment once I completed graduate school. I took his advice, went on to Bowling Green State University for my doctoral training, and wound up working with a former student of his, the late Douglas Ullman, then on faculty. I chose to continue studying hyperactive children for both my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation, publishing both studies as well as the related literature reviews. And I have stayed with the topic ever since. The disorder fascinates me as a window onto how typical human self-regulation may develop by studying when it goes awry, as it does in ADHD.

Gratitude for His Impact on the Field of ADHD

"CHADD has been privileged to work with Dr. Barkley for more than thirty years. Most recently, in 2018, CHADD and Dr. Barkley partnered to announce his groundbreaking findings regarding ADHD and life expectancy. That same year, he was the recipient of CHADD's Lifetime Achievement Award. CHADD's highest honor, this award was created to recognize sustained, fundamental, and outstanding contributions to the field of ADHD. This seldom-presented award celebrates a lived spirit in terms of mutual respect, trust, support, inspiration, and encouragement of other professionals: words that epitomize Dr. Barkley. CHADD joins the rest of the ADHD community in wishing Dr. Barkley well as he embarks on a new chapter of his life."

—Patricia Hudak, PCC, BCC,
president of CHADD (Children & Adults with ADHD)

"The best part of volunteering with CHADD has been the opportunity to meet and work with my personal heroes in the study and treatment of ADHD. Dr. Barkley's contributions to the field have affected millions of individuals with ADHD and their families, including my own. We wish him all the best in retirement and hope that he knows how very grateful we are for his work on behalf of our community."

—Belynda Gauthier, past president of CHADD

"Dr. Russell Barkley has had a profound effect on adults with ADHD during his career as a scientist, author and educator. His research on ADHD throughout our lifespan was groundbreaking. His ongoing efforts to win recognition for the potentially devastating impact of ADHD on the lives of people with this different brain wiring have been monumental and are greatly appreciated."

—Duane Gordon,
president of ADDA (Attention Deficit Disorder Association)

"Dr. Barkley leaves an indelible impression on the ADHD coaching field. Because of his work, ADHD coaching is recognized in the clinical literature as a valuable and important component of multimodal treatment for individuals with ADHD. In addition to his other work, I am particularly grateful for his research demonstrating the numerous and potentially severe impairments that ADHD can have on major life activities. He convinced the medical world to treat an adult diagnosis seriously. As a result, those with ADHD live better lives because of his career."

—Tamara Rosier, PhD,
president of ACO (ADHD Coaches Organization)

What was it like working on ADHD in the early days compared to now?

It was an exciting time, as many young professionals like me were moving into the topic to study thanks to their mentors, such as Carol Whalen (Steve Hinshaw was her student), Jan Loney (Richard Milich), Virginia Douglas (Susan Campbell), Rachel Klein (Howard Abikoff), Gabrielle Weiss (Lily Hechtman), Robert Sprague (John Werry), Marcel Kinsbourne (Jim Swanson), Keith Conners (Karen Wells, Jeff Epstein) and many others. Far less was known about ADHD then, and so it was much easier both to keep up with the new research being published as well as to make contributions to the field through one's own research. With several hundred thousand papers now published and thirty-plus being published per week in journals, it is far harder to keep up with it these days, though I try, and more difficult to make unique contributions to the field.

You have always been a strong proponent of following the science when it comes to diagnosis and treatment. You have been a tireless researcher, but also an eager disseminator of empirically based information to researchers, clinicians, and members of the public. How do those two roles relate to each other?

For many clinical scientists, they are not related at all. Most clinical researchers concentrate on getting grants and publishing journal articles, as that is how they advance in their academic rank and status within their universities. Indeed, many condescend to or outright disdain making efforts to disseminate their findings to the lay people with the disorders they are studying. It is seen as detracting from their career goals. But I was strongly influenced by the examples of Jacob Bronowski, who in the 1970s created the *Ascent of Man* series for PBS, then later Carl Sagan and his series on astronomy, and then Richard Dawkins and his popularizing of the theory of evolution through his many books.

So, whenever an opportunity presented itself, I gladly gave lectures to professionals, schools and educators, and lay people. I saw

immediately how the findings from our research could help to change their lives for the better and do it faster than would be the case for the five to ten years it takes for journal articles to filter down and influence clinical practice and people's lives. People were so eager for findings from recent studies that could improve their understanding and care of their loved ones with ADHD that I found it incredibly rewarding to provide such lectures to them. And then I decided that, besides writing books for professionals, I would write some for parents and families with children with ADHD, and later for adults with ADHD. I think my trade books have had a far larger impact on the lives of people than any journal article I ever published.

Looking back on a career spanning more than forty years, what would you do differently if you could?

Nothing major. I was fortunate to be able to follow my curiosity and explore new ideas about ADHD and usually was able to garner grant support to do so. I don't think I would change a thing, given how incredibly fortunate I was to find work doing the things I found so meaningful in my professional life.

What do you see as the future of the field of ADHD? What should today's researchers and clinicians be focused on?

There will be obvious benefits from all the studies being done on molecular genetics, the role of ADHD risk genes in building and operating brain networks and the behavior and cognition for which they are responsible. This is being coupled with neuroimaging to understand how ADHD risk genes impact brain functioning. But it will also likely lead to new and more targeted medications, assist with diagnosis someday (not yet), and maybe even lead to ways to prevent ADHD or at least mitigate its many impairments and comorbidities. I think those two fields—genetics and neuroimaging—are making the most headway right now in understanding etiologies of ADHD.

We have also identified within the population of those with ADHD a second disorder,

previously called sluggish cognitive tempo, that is very different from ADHD but was lumped in with it in earlier years as ADHD was the only attention disorder diagnosis. But the discovery of this second syndrome, soon to be called cognitive disengagement hypoactivity syndrome, alerted us to the fact that there is more than one attention disorder and that it is quite different from ADHD. It is manifested by staring, mind wandering, daydreaming, mental confusion, and sometimes a sleepy appearance, along with reduced motor activity at times. I have been privileged to serve on a work group with the leading researchers in the field on SCT (CDHS), and we just completed a review of the literature this month that will be published in a journal early next year. It sets forth what we know and also directions for future research as well as renaming the syndrome to something less pejorative or offensive.

As you know, I think ADHD is a disorder of self-regulation and its underlying executive functions. So, I think adding more symptoms of those problems to our diagnostic criteria will help improve diagnosis, but also show us that the disorder is far more stable over development and that fewer people outgrow it than is currently the case in longitudinal studies that rely on DSM-5 and its childhood-focused symptoms. I also think it dignifies the disorder better than does referring to it as just an attention disorder, which many people do not find to be especially serious as a syndrome. 🗨️

Russell A. Barkley, PhD, is an internationally recognized authority on ADHD in children and adults who has dedicated his career to widely disseminating science-based information about ADHD. Read more about his life and his many accomplishments at <http://www.russellbarkley.org/about.html>. Dr. Barkley fully retired from the profession of clinical psychology and neuropsychology at the end of 2021.



Ari Tuckman, PsyD, CST, is a psychologist and sex therapist in private practice in West Chester, Pennsylvania, a former member of CHADD's board of directors, and co-chair of CHADD's conference committee.

An Illustrious Career, By the Numbers

4

Years serving in the Air Force, including one tour of Vietnam

44

Years since receiving his PhD

26, with 43 editions

Books, rating scales, and clinical manuals

More than 300

Scientific articles and book chapters on ADHD and related disorders

28

Years as editor since founding *The ADHD Report*

More than 800

Invited lectures presented

More than 30

Number of countries presented in

Countless

Number of lives improved by his work