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Obituary: James Diamond, Former ABPI President

by

A highly respected industry leader, James Diamond served on the board of Beecham Group and was elected president of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry in 1986.

The family of James B Diamond announced with sadness that he died aged 94 in Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton after a short illness on March 13, 2019.

James Diamond had a distinguished career in the British pharmaceutical industry lasting over 40 years. He served as a main board director of Beecham Group, eventually holding the executive role of chairman of Beecham Pharmaceuticals UK Division. His responsibilities included the operation and strategic direction of the Beecham major antibiotic plants and pharmaceutical factories. He was also responsible for the commercial operations of the UK prescription medicines business and the international business of Beecham Animal Health.

In 1986 James was elected as president of the ABPI (the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry). In 1987 he was awarded the CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for his services to the British pharmaceutical industry.

James was born the youngest of three children on December 28, 1924 in Lennoxton, near Glasgow, to a shoemaker, John, and his wife Isabella. He was encouraged by a local professor to study chemical engineering at the Royal Technical College in Glasgow (subsequently part of the University of Glasgow) and he later became an Associate of the Royal Chemical Engineers Society (now the Institution of Chemical Engineers) and a member of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

James's first work position was for the Ministry of Supply during the war. This ministry undertook the planning and financing of the production of major war time requirements, of which one was the manufacture of penicillin. The Distillers Company was contracted to manage a penicillin plant that was built in Speke, Liverpool. Distillers bought this plant in 1947. It is

therefore not surprising that as a young man in the late 1940s, James moved to Liverpool and began working for the Distillers Company. Sir Robert Watson-Watt, the pioneer of radar technology, interviewed him for this role.

In 1951, shortly after moving to Liverpool, James married Winifred Seagrave and began a family with a daughter, Ann and a son, Kevin.

His work at Distillers continued for many years. James's achievements included inventing a new and important antibiotic process, which is still used worldwide today to make the antibiotic streptomycin, and helping Distillers to double production of penicillin in the post-war years.

In 1962, Distillers was sold to [*Eli Lilly & Co.*](#) Distillers became known as Dista Products and James took the helm as managing director. Under his guidance it grew to be the principal manufacturing center for antibiotics in Europe. His skills in running highly efficient manufacturing antibiotic processes and a successful business operation were clearly proven.

In 1970 James joined Beecham Pharmaceuticals in Brentford, West London as the UK marketing director. This appointment contributed to the rapid development of the company's business in prescription antibiotics. When James joined the company, Beecham was facing patent expiry on its major selling antibiotic, Penbritin (ampicillin). It was James who led the team that devised and implemented a business strategy that produced sustained growth from new antibiotics developed by the company's highly productive R&D program. Many of these products remain in wide clinical use today, including Amoxil (amoxicillin), Augmentin (amoxicillin/clavulanic acid), and Floxapen (flucloxacillin).

As chairman of the UK division of Beecham Pharmaceuticals, in addition to his responsibilities for manufacturing, marketing and sales operations James's work included oversight of the UK medical department which undertook clinical trials for new products and post-marketing surveillance of existing products, monitoring their safety. His input into such studies was important in underpinning the subsequent success in clinical use of Beecham Pharmaceuticals' new medicines that were launched during his period with the company.

James during the 1980s was a board member of the British Pharmaceutical Industry Association, the ABPI. Towards the end of his career, he was invited to become its president. He was a particularly effective leader in renegotiating the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) with the UK government. This scheme helped to ensure that the UK attracted significant amounts of R&D investment from major international pharma companies and helped to build British research success.

For those colleagues who were fortunate enough to work with James, he was an outstanding strategic thinker with very principled views about how companies should be managed. He was

always concerned to make the organizations he led grow and be more resilient at facing the future. Although James had high expectations, he was very fair and supportive of his staff and managers. Colleagues always appreciated working for a man who was so dedicated, knowledgeable and set such a fine example.

James retired from his Beecham career in 1988 just prior to its merger with Smith Kline. During his retirement, James became a keen gardener and traveled the world with Winifred, his wife of sixty-two years. He will be remembered with great affection by his family and his great many colleagues and friends in Beecham and more widely in the pharmaceutical industry.

There will be a funeral service for James in Chard, Somerset, in the church he attended in the later years of his retirement. The service will take place on March 28 beginning at 11:00 at the English Martyrs Church, 2 East Street, Chard, TA20 1EP.

There will be a reception afterwards for all attending – location to be advised.

By Rebecca Helsby, granddaughter, and Nick Heightman, Beecham colleague 1970 to 1988, former strategic marketing director, Beecham Pharmaceuticals and currently senior advisor TAGCyx Biotechnologies, Tokyo.