

Sir Norman Purvis Walker (1862–1942)

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One of the first people in Britain to benefit from the discovery of insulin was a Treasurer of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

Norman Walker was physician-in-charge of the Skin Department at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and was regarded as the foremost dermatologist in Scotland. He became Treasurer of this College in 1908. Shortly after the end of World War I he took ill and was found to be suffering from diabetes. By 1922 he was reduced to extreme emaciation and muscular weakness, and his colleagues held little hope for his survival. The discoverers of insulin heard of his condition and sent some insulin from Canada before it was generally available. Walker, however, insisted that these first batches be given to a boy of ten whose need he considered to be the greater. When Walker did eventually receive insulin the effect was immediate.

‘This saved his life. The transformation was nothing short of marvellous and in a few weeks he had put on several stones in weight and looked as he had done before his illness.’¹

Norman Walker went on to be awarded a knighthood in 1923, and in the following year founded the Scottish Dermatological Society. He was elected President of this College in 1929, and President of the General Medical Council in 1931. His *Introduction to Dermatology*, which was first published in 1899, became a standard textbook. It was revised and updated through to a 13th edition published in 1967.



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REFERENCE

- 1 From Sir Norman P Walker's obituary written by Robert Cranston Low, a Fellow of the College and friend of Norman Walker. It appeared in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* in December 1942.