

**Medicine Women:** From their 18th century beginnings, American medical schools were closed to women. Harvard Medical School founded by three men in 1782, was open to men only.

As a young girl Harriot K. Hunt was educated in private schools. She became a teacher and in 1827 opened her own school. She was interested in medicine, but unable to attend medical school as her brother who earned his M.D.

Lucretia Mott and her husband who shared a medical practice treated Harriot's sister in 1833. Mott was the first woman Hunt had seen practicing as a physician. She immediately began studying medicine independently and became a medical practitioner who treated women and children.

After thirteen years of practice, in 1847 she became the first woman to apply to a medical school. She petitioned Harvard dean Dr. Oliver Wendell Holms, to be admitted just to lectures. The all-male student body, however, met and drew up resolutions of rejection against her stating they were opposed to having the presence of a female in their lecture rooms forced upon them. Their force was greater than that of the dean and Harvard refused her.

Three years later, emboldened by the breakthroughs following the 1848 Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, Hunt again petitioned Holms and was successful. However, before she attended any lecture, the male students gathered in protest. Leading members of the faculty met with Hunt and influenced her to recoil.

Her further and numerous attempts throughout the northeast did not merit her admission to any medical school. She continued as a homeopathic physician and became a professor of midwifery and of diseases of women and children at Rochester College. In 1853 she received an honorary degree from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania.

In her 1856 book, *Glances and Glimpses: Or, Fifty Years' Social, Including Twenty Years' Professional Life*, Hunt writes of her inner sorrow from Harvard depriving her knowledge, a book which now sits on a shelf in the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University Medical College.

Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell too had been refused admission to several medical schools because of her gender but found acceptance at The Geneva College of Medicine, a small school in upstate New York. But hers was a hate filled acceptance process that began with the dean.

He presented Blackwell's application directly to his students to decide whether a woman should be allowed to enter classes. He stipulated their decision would have to be unanimous which he was confident would result in a negative verdict. The students, however, decided it would be a great joke and unanimously voted to admit her. Blackwell bravely sat in classrooms filled with these male students.

Anticipated unruly incidents at the lectures did not occur but a genuine respect between the "jokester" male students and their female colleague did. When asked to absent herself from the lecture on the anatomy of the male reproductive system, Blackwell refused and earned sincere support from her "fellow" students. She passed the qualifying examination with the highest average and graduated in 1849 as Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D. the first American woman to receive a formal medical degree.

Her sister Dr. Emily Blackwell, M.D. also had encountered opposition to her medical education achievements. Although accepted to Rush Medical College in Chicago, the all male Illinois State Medical Society prevented her from completing her studies there. She earned her degree at The Cleveland Medical College.

Other women to be of the first to earn M.D. degrees were Dr. Mary Harris Thompson and Dr. Marie Zakrzewska. Dr. Thompson, America's first female surgeon, founded the Chicago Hospital for Women and Children and helped organize a college for the medical education of women. Dr. Zakrzewska developed the concept of maintaining medical records. The Drs.

Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell and Zakrzewska opened the New York Infirmary for Women and Children in 1857, the first hospital in the United States operated by women.

Acceptance of women into the male-medical profession proved to be far off, far into the 20th century.

Patsy Mink wanted to be a doctor and in 1948 was well prepared for medical school with dual undergraduate degrees in zoology and chemistry, or so she thought. Mink applied to twenty med schools. None accepted women. Mink decided to attend law school to adjudicate this gender injustice. She obtained her J. D. in 1951 as the only woman in her graduating class at the University of Chicago. During her career as an elected U. S. Representative from the state of Hawaii (1965-2002) Mink co-authored the landmark Title IX legislation.

Born in 1951, little Suze always thought she was going to be a doctor. Her cousin Jolene was born autistic and from an early age, she wanted to fix Jolene's brain. Suze would pretend operate on her dolls, cutting into their heads. At 13, she became a candy striper in Chicago's Michael Reese Hospital where she could volunteer whenever she chose. When her father was hospitalized with burns he suffered in a fire, Suze pretended to be his doctor.

In 1969 when she met with her college counselor and said she wanted to be a brain surgeon, the counselor counseled, "Women aren't doctors. Women are nurses," and would not sign off on her premed courses. Suze majored in social work.

The adult Suze who could have been one of the best doctors, if not one of the best brain surgeons, went on to become one of the best, if not the best, financial brain doctor to millions whose lives have been saved by Suze Orman.

NOTE: 1945 - Harvard Medical School admits women.

Sources: MORE July/August 2005;

<http://www.homeoint.org/cazalet/histo/pennsylvfem.htm>;

<http://www.healthguidance.org/entry/6355/1/Medical-History--Women-in-Medicine.html>