

# OMA women physician pioneers

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It is no secret that medicine was a male-dominated profession in 1880, when the OMA was founded. Mount Allison in New Brunswick was the first university in Canada to admit women in 1862, however, acceptance by any Canadian university did not include the right to enrol in professional faculties. Fortunately, women challenged the status quo and not only became physicians, but also achieved great success in medical politics.

Following is the first of a two-part article examining the role of women in the OMA. Part one focuses on the medical and political influence of the OMA's female "firsts."

## Dr. Emily Howard Stowe

Due to the lack of Canadian medical training for women, all of the women physicians practising in Canada prior to 1883 had trained in schools in the United States or Great Britain. Among them were Drs. Emily Howard Stowe (New York Medical College for Women, 1867), Jennie Kidd Trout (Women's Medical College of Philadelphia, 1875), and Leonora Howard King and Amelia LeSueur Yeomans (University of Michigan, 1876 and 1883, respectively).<sup>1</sup>

According to the OMA's "1892-

1893 Officers and List of Members" (which includes OMA members from 1881 to 1892), E.H. Stowe of Toronto became a member in 1888.<sup>2</sup> As Drs. Trout, King, and Yeomans are not listed, it is assumed that Dr. Emily Howard Stowe was the first female member of the OMA.

Dr. Stowe was born Emily Howard Jennings in Norwich, Upper Canada (Ontario) in 1831. In 1854, she became the first woman appointed as principal of a public school (Brantford Central School) in Upper Canada, where she taught until her marriage to John Stowe in 1856.

Following the birth of her third child, Emily Stowe went back to school (New York Medical College for Women) to become a doctor. After graduating in 1867, Dr. Stowe returned to Canada, but could not

obtain a licence to practise medicine.

In 1869, the Ontario Medical Act was passed, appointing a Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) as the sole licencing board in the province.

One of the CPSO's regulations stipulated that "graduates from the United States must attend one session of lectures at a recognized Ontario medical school and must take an exam."<sup>3</sup> However, as a woman, Dr. Stowe could not gain admission. In spite of this, she opened a medical practice in Toronto which focused primarily on the care of women and children, thus becoming the first female physician to practise — albeit illegally — in Canada.

The Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons finally granted Dr. Stowe a medical licence in 1880, after she and Jennie Kidd Trout were allowed to attend lectures at the Toronto School of Medicine.

In 1883, Dr. Stowe helped found the Women's Medical College in Toronto. A sister school affiliated with Queen's University opened in Kingston later that year. In 1895, the schools were combined and renamed the Ontario Medical College for Women.

## Dr. Augusta Stowe-Gullen

In 1883, Dr. Stowe's daughter, Augusta, became the first woman to obtain a medical degree in Canada. She graduated from Victoria College Medical School (this college was



Dr. Emily Stowe (1831-1903), left, was among the very first women granted a medical licence in Canada. OMA archival records list Dr. Stowe and her daughter, Dr. Augusta Stowe-Gullen (1857-1943), as the first two female members of the Ontario Medical Association.

affiliated with the Toronto School of Medicine, a precursor to the University of Toronto faculty of medicine, formed in 1887).

In 1883, Augusta married fellow graduate John Benjamin Gullen, and together they helped found the Toronto Western Hospital in 1896.

Dr. Augusta Stowe-Gullen was the first woman to teach at a Canadian medical school when she was named demonstrator in anatomy at the Woman's Medical College. She was appointed lecturer on diseases of children in 1890, and professor of pediatrics in 1893 — a position she held until 1906, when the Ontario Medical College for Women closed, and women were admitted to the University of Toronto faculty of medicine.

The clinic of the Ontario Medical College for Women remained open, later becoming Women's College Hospital.

OMA records show Dr. Stowe-Gullen became a member of the OMA in 1891<sup>4</sup> — only the second female OMA member after her mother.

Both women were politically active. In 1877, Dr. Stowe helped found the influential and broadly active Toronto Women's Literary Club (renamed the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association in 1883), and the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association in 1889, of which she was president.

Dr. Stowe-Gullen became president of the Suffrage Association when her mother died in 1903, and in 1935 was awarded the Order of the British Empire.

Dr. Stowe-Gullen died in 1943.

#### **Dr. Bette Stephenson**

The Stowes exemplify the determined and courageous efforts of Canada's first female physicians. They were pioneers who prepared the way for other women in medical politics, such as Dr. Bette Stephenson, the first woman to serve on the OMA Board of Directors (1964-1973).

Dr. Stephenson graduated from University of Toronto faculty of medicine in 1946, and went into general family practice with her hus-

band and medical colleague, Dr. Allan Pengelly.

Dr. Stephenson served as a member of the OMA Committee on Education (1963-1966), and as Chair of the Special Committee on Mental Health (1971-1973). She was the first woman physician elected president of the OMA (1970-1971), and went on to become the first woman president of the Canadian Medical Association (1974-1975).

Dr. Stephenson also achieved great success in the political sphere. She was elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1975 as MPP for York Mills, and went on to serve as Minister of Labour, Education, and Colleges, Universities and Training. Dr. Stephenson was later appointed Chair of Management Board of Cabinet, and Minister of Economics, Treasurer, and Deputy Premier (1985). She received the Order of Canada in 1992, and the Order of Ontario in 1998.

Dr. Stephenson has served on the boards of the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research, and the Ontario Innovation Trust.

She is currently Chair of the Learning Opportunities Task Force, which integrates learning-disabled students into post-secondary education.<sup>5</sup>

### Dr. Carole Guzmán

Dr. Carole Guzmán is only the second woman to be elected president of the OMA.

A graduate of the University of Toronto (1958), Dr. Guzmán practised as an internist specializing in pulmonary disease. She first joined the Academy of Medicine Ottawa in the mid-1970s, and served on many OMA committees, including the Bursaries and Loans Committee (1981-1987), Drugs and Pharmacotherapy (1982-1984), and as Chair of the Finance Committee (1986-1987).

Elected President of the OMA in 1989, Dr. Guzmán dealt with several difficult issues during her year in office, such as obtaining independent binding arbitration, and legally challenging the Health Care Accessi-

bility Act, which outlawed extra billing for physician services.

Dr. Guzmán was also elected President of the Canadian Medical Association (1991-1992) — the second woman to head both the OMA and CMA.

She conducted research and practised rehabilitation medicine at Ottawa's National Defence Medical Centre for 22 years, developing a care model for patients with chest disease that is still used today.<sup>6</sup>

The careers of these four physicians illustrate remarkable achievements in medicine, education, and the advancement of women's rights.

Their ability to guide change in society's medical and political spheres illustrates the profound impact of physicians' influence — an influence that continues to help guide health care in Ontario. **OMR**

### References

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To access archival material regarding Dr. Emily Stowe and Dr. Augusta Stowe-Gullen contact the Wilfred Laurier University Special Collections, Waterloo, and Victoria University Archives, Toronto.

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