

## Dr Catherine Chisholm (1878-1952)

The Museum displays, in the Manchester Science Gallery, a collection of surgical instruments used at the Manchester Babies Hospital, which was founded by Dr Catherine Chisholm.

Catherine Chisholm was the daughter of Dr Kenneth Chisholm, a general practitioner in Radcliffe. Catherine joined her father on some of his medical rounds and was strongly encouraged into medicine by him. She enrolled at Manchester Victoria University in 1898 to study medicine. She was one of the first women to be accepted as a medical student. In 1904, Catherine became the first woman to qualify as a doctor at the Manchester Medical School. She was the University's medical officer for women students from 1918 to 1947.



Following university, Dr Chisholm secured a resident doctor post at the Clapham Maternity Hospital in London. The hospital was a women-run hospital founded by Dr Annie McCall, who argued for the establishment of welfare clinics for mothers and children. Dr Chisholm returned to Manchester in 1906. She set up in general practice near the Victoria University, but she became increasingly interested in the care of babies and children. In 1908, she was appointed medical officer for the Manchester High School for Girls, a post she held for 30 years. In the same year, she became Honorary Physician to the Chorlton-on-Medlock Dispensary, which dealt mainly with women and children's problems.

By 1911, Dr Chisholm had become involved in the infant welfare movement as the Medical Adviser to the Manchester Public Health Committee. This committee established a series of maternity and infant welfare clinics, classes in infant care for mothers, a free milk scheme, municipal nurseries and a health visitors' scheme. Dr Chisholm also held honorary appointments as a Children's Physician to the Northern Hospital and the Salford Union Workhouse Infirmary.

In 1914, Dr Chisholm called a meeting of local women doctors and the public health committee. At this meeting she argued for the provision of a hospital for infants only, the outcome being the foundation of the Manchester Babies Hospital. The hospital had financial support from Margaret Ashton, a wealthy feminist. She was the first woman to be voted onto the Manchester City Council, where she was chairman of the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee. The Manchester Babies Hospital (MBH) opened on the 4 August 1914. It was partly modelled on the London Infants Hospital, but the MBH was staffed entirely by women doctors.

In 1920, Dr Chisholm visited the Boston Children's Hospital to study their human milk bank scheme and the treatment of rickets in the USA. Rickets was a problem in industrial areas. It accounted for over 20% of patients at the Manchester Babies Hospital, although it was curable if caught early enough. A new purpose-built ward soon opened at the MBH for the treatment of rickets and a breast milk scheme was also established. This eventually led to the setting up of a milk collection scheme within the community.

Dr Chisholm was awarded a CBE in the 1935 New Year Honours List as an acknowledgement of her important contribution to child health care. In the same year the name of the Manchester Babies Hospital was changed to the Duchess of York Hospital for Babies, following a visit from the Duchess to open a new wing. With the emergence of the National Health Service, the Duchess of York Hospital became isolated from larger paediatric centres at Pendlebury and Booth Hall Hospitals. In 1986 it closed despite protests. A Duchess of York Children's Ward opened at Withington Hospital.

Dr Chisholm taught at the Manchester Medical School and always encouraged other women doctors establishing their careers. It was her ambition that the Manchester Babies Hospital would become not only a centre for child's health but also a centre for training medical women. She became President of the Medical Women's Federation of Great Britain in 1928 and was an original member and first president of the Manchester Paediatric Club, which was founded in March 1948. In 1950, Dr Chisholm was awarded an honorary fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians, the first woman to receive this honour.

Dr Chisholm died in 1952. Her obituary in the Manchester Evening News described her as 'one of the greatest women doctors of the century'.

*For more information:*

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| <i>Read</i>    | Mohr, Dr Peter D. 'Dr Catherine Chisholm (1879-1952) of the Manchester Babies' Hospital: Feminism, Welfare and Medicine' in <i>Manchester Memoirs</i> , 140, (2001-2002): pp21-30. |
| <i>Consult</i> | Manchester Medical Collection Dr Catherine Chisholm file, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester.   |
| <i>Visit</i>   | The Manchester Science Gallery.  |