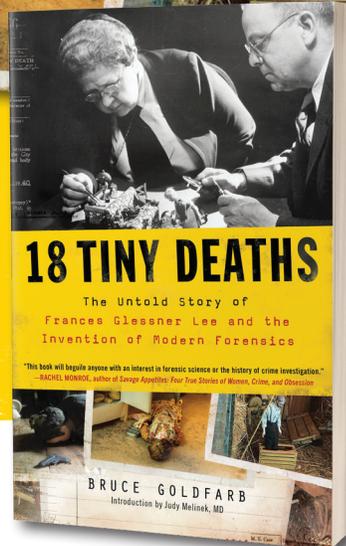




18 TINY DEATHS

Subject Guide: **WOMEN IN MEDICINE**



When she came of age in the late 1890s, Frances Glessner Lee would have liked to attend medical school. A career as a physician was unusual for a woman at the time, but not unheard of. For most of American history, the vast majority of doctors were men. By the end of the 19th century there were about 350 women doctors in the U.S.—about 5 percent of all 7,000 physicians in the country—and 19 women’s medical schools.

Lee didn’t go to college because the only institution she wanted to attend—Harvard Medical School—did not accept women students until 1945.

Today, about 70 percent of all physicians in America are men. However, the proportion of women in medicine is increasing rapidly. About 60 percent of doctors age 35 and younger are women, and in 2017 for the first time more women than men were enrolled in U.S. medical schools. (1,2)

The advancement of women medical doctors was gradual. Among the trailblazing women in medicine are:

HARRIOT KEZIA HUNT: Although she lacked a medical degree, Hunt was one of the first women with a professional medical practice in the U.S. In 1850, Hunt was allowed to attend lectures at Harvard Medical School, which so disturbed other students that she was asked to leave. Harvard didn’t allow women medical students for almost another century.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL, M.D.: Graduating at the top of her class at Geneva Medical College in 1849, Blackwell was the first woman to receive a medical degree in the U.S. In 1857, she established the New York Infirmary for Women and Children and was a pioneer in preventive medicine and infection control.

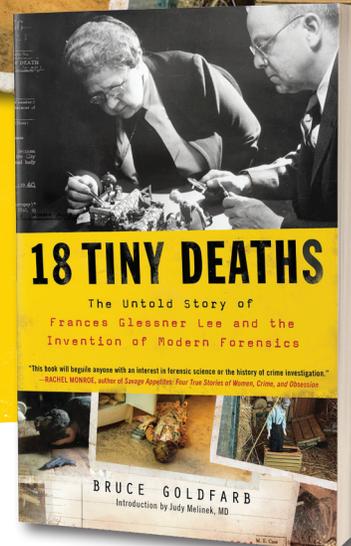
REBECCA LEE CRUMPLER, M.D.: The first African American woman physician in the U.S. Beginning her medical career as a nurse, Crumpler graduated in 1864 from the New England Female Medical College. In 1883, Crumpler published *A Book of Medical Discourses*, the first medical text written by an African American in the U.S.

MARY EDWARDS WALKER, M.D.: One of the first women surgeons in the U.S., Walker was the first woman awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for her work during the Civil War. The medal was revoked in 1907 and restored in 1977.



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SUSAN LA FLESCHÉ PICOTTE, M.D.: First Native American woman to receive a medical degree in the U.S., and the first person to receive federal aid for professional education.

HELEN BROOKE TAUSSIG, M.D.: A pediatric cardiologist who, along with Vivien Thomas and Alfred Blalock, M.D., devised the “blue baby” operation that helped launch the era of open heart surgery. In the early 1960s, Taussig warned about birth defects caused by thalidomide, leading the FDA to deny the drug’s approval in the U.S.

Further Information

Changing the Face of Medicine: Celebrating America’s Women Physicians, National Library of Medicine online exhibit, <https://cfmedicine.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/>

Women in Science: 50 Fearless Pioneers Who Changed the World by Rachael Ignotofsky, 2016

Magnificent Minds: 16 Pioneering Women in Science and Medicine by Pendred Noyce, 2016

The Fight for Women Doctors by Jeff Nilsson and Maude Radford Warren, Saturday Evening Post, Jan 14, 2016. <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2016/01/fight-women-doctors/>

Sources

1. “The healthcare future is female,” Athenahealth Feb 14, 2018 (<https://www.athenahealth.com/insight/healthcare-future-female>)
2. “More women than men enrolled in U.S. medical schools in 2017,” Association of American Medical Schools press release, Dec 17, 2017.

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