



May Cohen, MD

A pioneer for positive change in women's health, May Cohen graduated at the top of her class in 1955 at a time when fewer than seven percent of medical students in Canada were women. Following a twenty year career as a family physician in Toronto, Dr. Cohen joined the department of family medicine at McMaster University in 1977 and served as associate dean of health services from 1991 to 1996. She co-founded the first faculty of medicine Women's Health Office in 1991, triggering several medical schools to follow suit, which led to the creation of the Women's Health Inter School Curriculum Committee for Ontario's medical schools.

Dr. Cohen has received many accolades, including the Federation of Medical Women of Canada Ortho Award for the Promotion of Women's Health, the Governor General's Award, and the Leadership Development Award from the American Association of Medical Colleges. Dr. Cohen was also honoured with lifetime membership in the Ontario Medical Association and senior membership in the Canadian Medical Association, where she has also been awarded the prestigious CMA Medal of Service.

Another measure of Dr. Cohen's contributions to medicine is through the numerous awards and distinctions that bear her name. The annual Eli Lilly-May Cohen Chair in Women's Health at McMaster was created in 2002, and complements the CMA-May Cohen Award for Women Mentors and the AFMC-May Cohen Equity, Diversity, and Gender Award.

Securing institutional recognition of women's health issues has transformed the educational experience of all health students, male and female, and has enhanced the status of women in medical practice and in medical faculties throughout Ontario and Canada. Dr. Cohen's long career has been instrumental in advancing enlightened treatment for women in areas ranging from breast cancer to spousal abuse. If today we take these achievements almost for granted, we can do so because of the efforts of courageous pioneers like Dr. Cohen who overcame great obstacles and opened medical practice to a deeper appreciation of women's needs.