



Emily Stowe, MD

Dr. Emily Stowe ranks as a true pioneer. She is the first female public school principal in Ontario, the first female physician to practise medicine in Canada and a lifelong champion of women's rights who helped to found the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association. In 1865, although opportunities for women to study medicine in Canada were limited, Emily Stowe applied to the Toronto School of Medicine. She was denied entry. Unable to study in Canada, she moved to the United States and enrolled at the New York Medical College for Women, a homeopathic institution. She obtained her degree in 1867 and returned to Canada, setting up practice on Richmond Street in Toronto.

In the mid-1860s, a reorganization in the medical profession made it obligatory for homeopathic physicians and doctors trained in the United States to take further medical courses to obtain their licenses. It was not until 1871 that Dr. Stowe would be admitted to the school becoming one of the first two women to attend lectures at the Toronto School of Medicine. On July 16, 1880, she was finally granted her medical license by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

In 1883, she spearheaded the creation of Woman's Medical College in Toronto. Fifteen years later, "The Dispensary" was opened, a medical clinic created to provide practical clinical experience to the students of Woman's Medical College. Services at The Dispensary were provided regardless of a patient's ability to pay and medical advice was free. In 1911, The Dispensary became Women's College Hospital of Toronto which continues in operation today.

Dr. Stowe also helped found the influential Toronto Women's Literary Guild, Canada's first suffragette group set up to fight for women's rights and improvement of working conditions. Pressure exerted by members of this club opened the doors for higher education for women in Toronto.

As a proponent of women's rights, she was determined to help make medical education more readily available for women putting pressure on the University of Toronto to reverse its policy, enabling her daughter, Augusta Stowe-Gullen to become the first female doctor to graduate from a Canadian medical school.

Dr. Stowe died in 1903. She is remembered as a teacher, physician, and suffragist, a defender of women's rights and a champion for women in medicine. Faced with repeated refusals to allow her to study in Ontario for her medical license, Dr. Stowe declared, "the day will come when these doors will swing wide open to every female who chooses to apply." That day has come, and it is due to the perseverance and leadership of courageous women like Dr. Stowe.