Boston Children's Hospital

Mary Ellen Avery, MD

Papers, 1942 – 2000 [bulk]

Manuscript Collection – MC 15

Boston Children's Hospital Archives

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ACQUISITION
The Mary Ellen Avery, M.D. Papers were given to the hospital archives by Mary Ellen Avery, MD in 2000 and 2001.

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The collection is unrestricted.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

"Mary Ellen Avery, M.D., died on December 4, 2011, at the age of 84. She was best known to the world for her ground breaking research on the cause of hyaline membrane disease (Respiratory Distress Syndrome), a discovery that saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of infants.

Dr. Avery was raised in Moorestown, New Jersey. She attended the Moorestown Friends School and graduated summa cum laude from Wheaton College with a degree in chemistry in 1948. She then attended Johns Hopkins School of Medicine as one of four women in a class of 90. During her internship in pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and it was during her recuperation that she became fascinated with how the lung works.

Following completion of her residency in 1957, she began a research fellowship at the Children's Hospital Boston under Dr. Clement Smith and at the Harvard School of Public Health under Dr. Jere Mead. It was during this time she made the career defining discovery in a landmark publication in the *American Journal of Diseases of Children* that Respiratory Distress Syndrome is caused by a lack of lung surfactant. It was a finding that in subsequent years saved the lives of countless babies and earned her the Medal of Science in 1991 and election to the National Academy of Science. Her reputation soared and was followed by classic papers on neonatal physiology in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Science*, and *Nature*, as well as multiple editions of her textbooks, *The Lung and its Disorders in the Newborn Infant* and P*ediatric Medicine*.

In 1960, she started working at Johns Hopkins rising to the rank of Eudwood Associate Professor of Pulmonary Diseases of Children and pediatrician-in-charge of the newborn nurseries. In 1969, she was recruited to Montreal as chair of the Department of Pediatrics at McGill University and physician-in-chief of Montreal Children's Hospital.

In 1974, Dr. Avery was recruited to Boston as physician-in-chief at the Children's Hospital [Boston], the first woman to serve in that role, and as the Thomas Morgan Rotch Professor of Pediatrics at the Harvard Medical School, the first woman to chair a major clinical department at Harvard. She served in these capacities from 1974 until 1985. During that time, she greatly strengthened the hospital's capabilities in neonatology by establishing the Joint Program in Neonatology at the Children's Hospital, the Brigham and Women's Hospital, and the Beth Israel Hospital. She was highly successful in attracting young women into pediatrics and greatly strengthened the academic underpinnings of the pediatric residency and its subspecialties, with many graduates subsequently holding leadership positions nationally. Finally, she fostered rapid growth in the Divisions of General Pediatrics, Pulmonary Medicine, Neonatology, and Genetics and augmented the department's research and financial base.

Her awards were many including the E. Mead Johnson Award from the Academy of Pediatrics, the Chadwick Medal from the Massachusetts Thoracic Society, the Trudeau Medal from the American Lung Association, the Virginia Apgar Award from the Academy of Pediatrics, and the Philipson Prize in Pediatric Medicine from the Nobel Committee in 1998, and in 2005 the Howland Medal from the American Pediatric Society. She was the recipient of 13 honorary degrees including degrees from her Alma Maters Wheaton College and Johns Hopkins

University. Hers was a life of firsts: the first woman to be President of the Society for Pediatric Research, among very few women to be selected as President of the American Pediatric Society, and the first pediatrician to lead the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Stepping down as chair of the department of pediatrics in 1985, Dr. Avery turned her sights to global health, socioeconomic disparities, and human rights. She visited countries throughout the world with UNICEF promoting oral rehydration therapy and polio vaccination. She gave generously of her time mentoring innumerable young men and women."

Biographic information taken from: "In Memoriam: A Tribute & Celebration, Mary Ellen Avery, M.D., May 6, 1927 – December 4, 2011," a copy of which can be found in the Mary Ellen Avery, M.D. vertical file in the archives.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of Dr. Avery's professional papers that include her writings, correspondence, notes, and other materials she collected as physician-in-chief at Children's Hospital, as well materials collected during her career post-Children's. The materials are arranged alphabetically.

BOX LIST

Box	Folder
1	70th Birthday celebration, 1997
	71st Ross Conference on Pediatric Research, Gastrointestinal Development and Neonatal Nutrition, Black Point Inn, Prouts Neck, Maine, June 13-16, 1976 [cover for group photo; oversized]
	"75th Birthday Greetings to the Montreal Children's Hospital from Children's Hospital of Boston, 1979" presented by Clement, Smith, MD, Alexander Nadas, MD and Mary Ellen Avery, MD [oversized scroll]
	Articles about Dr. Avery, 1977, 1997, 1999
	"Brief history of the Department of Medicine Children's Hospital, Boston" by Mary Ellen Avery, MD
	Clement A. Smith Professorship Fund, 1985 [3 folders]
	Correspondence, 1990-1998
	Correspondence: "Letters from [Alexander J]. Schaffer, M.D." re: Diseases of the Newborn, 1970
	Correspondence re: "Continued status at CH Department of Medicine, 1997"
	Curriculum Vitae, updated November 1999

“Ethics in Immunology” speech given at 125th Celebration, May 28, 1994. Author Unknown.

Foundation for the National Institutes of Health, 2000

“Fourteen years: My autobiography” by Mary Ellen Avery, 1942

Honors, 1982, 1995-1999, 2001

“Interview with Gertrude Elion, Chapel Hill, NC, May 1997,” by Mary Ellen Avery, MD for Alpha Omega Alpha Oral History Project

1 Joint Program in Neonatology, 1993-1994

Korea visit, 1985

“Leaders in American Medicine: Mary Ellen Avery, M.D.,” 1992

Letter from Alan Ross to Mary Ellen Avery on move from Montreal Children’s to Boston Childrens, May 27, 1983

“Lung surfactant and neonatal respiratory distress syndrome,” *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, April 1998.

“Neonatal intensive care: ‘Incomplete solutions’” by H. William Taeusch and Mary Ellen Avery. *Harvard Medical Alumni Bulletin*, vol. 53, Sept-Oct. 1978.

Notes and correspondence re: women and minority HMS faculty, 1989-1999

Notes – India, December 6-14, 1995

Notes – Prouty Garden, n.d.

Notes – resignation as Physician in Chief, 1983-1984

Notes – visit to China, April 1994

Notes – visit to Turkey, 1986

Pediatric Group Practice, 1979

Pediatric Group Practice, 1981

“Presentation of the Kober Medal to Dr. Edwards A. Park” by James L. Gamble, 1950

Report: Goals of the Department of Medicine, CHMC by Mary Ellen Avery, MD. September 15, 1976

Review of Department of Medicine, CHMC and Department of Pediatrics at CHMC, HMS, September 1982.

“Samarkand, Uzbekistan: Universal Health Conference diary” from Dr. Alison Holloway, September 25, 1993

“Surfactant deficiency in hyaline membrane disease: The story of discovery,” by Mary Ellen Avery, MD [drafts and correspondence, 1999-2000]

“We repeat, 30 years later: ORT for acute diarrheal disease is ‘in’” by Mary Ellen Avery, M.D., 1999