

Dr. Jane Cooke Wright

by Katelyn Arnold, Westerly

Many powerful and influential women have impacted society. Dr. Jane Cooke Wright holds such accomplishments. Although she lacks the recognition of famous women such as Maya Angelou, Harriet Tubman, or Ruby Bridges; she made many important medical contributions to our society.

Jane Cooke Wright came from an incredible family, starting with her great-grandfather. He was a slave and later earned his medical degree at Meharry Medical University. Her step-father was the first African American to graduate from Yale Medical School. Finally, her father, Louis Wright, was the first African American to graduate from Harvard Medical School with a medical doctor degree. He was a surgeon and established the Cancer Research Center at Harlem Hospital.

Born in 1919, Jane grew up in Manhattan, New York. She first graduated from Smith College in Massachusetts with an art degree. Later, in 1945, she graduated from New York Medical College and then interned at Bellevue Hospital.

Early in her career she was hired as a physician at New York City public schools. After six months of work, she left her job to work with her father. Dr. Louis Wright worked in the lab experimenting with cancer research and Jane would perform the trials. In 1949, they began testing a new chemical on human leukemia.

After her father passed away in 1952, Dr. Jane Wright took over as head of the Cancer Research Foundation. She became a professor of surgical research at New York University. At the same time, she was the director of cancer chemotherapy research at NYU's medical center.

In 1967, she was named professor of surgery and head of the Cancer Chemotherapy Department. Late in her career, Jane became the first woman president of the New York Cancer Society. Finally in 1987, she retired.

After she retired, Jane became one of the seven founding members of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). She was the only woman in the founding group. Throughout her entire career, she authored approximately one hundred thirty-five scientific papers.

All of Jane's accomplishments made her a very influential figure. She changed our society by further developing cancer medicine. Some of her main accomplishments that improve our society include exploring the relationship between patient and tissue culture response and developing new techniques for chemotherapy.

Dr. Jane Wright inspires me because she made an exceptional career for herself while raising two daughters and battling discrimination against her skin color and womanhood. She was the highest ranking female African American physician in the United States. I wanted to learn about somebody that I didn't know. I had never heard Jane's name until this project, she was the perfect woman to write about.

Sadly, Jane died in 2013 at the age of 93. She lived a fulfilling and accomplished life. Her contributions will be remembered everywhere from college classes to patient treatments. She saved many lives and without her, there wouldn't have been as many advancements in medicine or our society.