‘Women don’t do that’
Female physicians in the 1960s faced challenges

By the time she was 13, Linda Hughes, MD, knew she wanted to become a physician. But in 1950s Texas, not everyone thought that was a good idea.

“When I decided I was going to medical school, my family was totally supportive,” she said. “But other people were not supportive. They said, ‘Women don’t do that.’”

While she was growing up, there were other signs that Dr. Hughes would stand out in a profession that was then overwhelmingly male. For instance, in 1959, the year she graduated from high school in Denton, she was the only girl in her physics class.

She had no issues while attending UT-Austin, but in 1962 she hit resistance when she ran for president of the premed society. “The president (of the group) spoke, saying, ‘Women belong at home, barefoot and pregnant,’” she said. “Then when he called for the vote, I got 78 votes, and the male candidate got two votes.”

Dr. Hughes was proud to graduate in 1967 as one of four women in her class of 100 at UT Southwestern Medical School. Many of her colleagues accepted female physicians, but the infrastructure of health care had not caught up with the changing attitudes. For instance, Parkland Hospital had no on-call rooms for many of the female physicians then. “We slept in the first-floor restroom alcove,” she recalled. “Somebody would come in and clean the room at 2 in the morning, and they didn’t care that we were trying to rest.”

Dr. Hughes married Lannie Hughes, MD, the year she graduated. They put their career plans on hold in 1968, when he was drafted to serve first in Vietnam and then at a stateside military base. But by 1974, they had settled in Dallas to establish their practices — she in psychiatry and he in gastroenterology.

In the early 1970s, both physicians juggled busy careers with three kids at home. She helped create the Dallas Women’s Psychiatry Group, a monthly gathering that mixed career and family interests for female physicians. “We’d get together on a Saturday morning once a month, have a scientific program, and the hostess would serve food,” she said. “And we would network about babysitting and different things. I was one of the founding members, but that group is still going strong, and it started in 1972.”

After a 31-year career in private practice and hospital administration, Dr. Hughes retired in 1999. That year, then-Gov. George W. Bush appointed her to the Board of Regents at Texas Woman’s University in Denton, where she served — also as chair and vice chair — until 2005. Since then, she has served on the board of the Dallas Women’s Foundation, was elected the first woman president of the UT Southwestern alumni association and was the only woman physician to serve as president of the DCMS Alliance (2010–11).

DMJ
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DCMS
WOMEN IN MEDICINE
Networking Social

We are excited to announce that DCMS has created a special interest group for female members to connect and network with one another—DCMS Women in Medicine! We hope you can join us at our first networking event. No formal program is planned, just the opportunity to enjoy the company of your female peers. Heavy hors d’oeuvres and adult beverages will be served.

Thursday, Sept. 13 at 6 - 8 pm | STIRR Dallas — 2803 Main St., Suite 110, Dallas

RESERVE YOUR SPOT BY MONDAY, SEPT. 10

RSVP to Cara Jaggers, director of member events, at cara@dallas-cms.org or call 214-948-3622. Space is limited, so please RSVP soon!

This event is sponsored exclusively by DCMS Circle of Friends.