The Philadelphia Award for 1984: Jennifer Allcock

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Jennifer Allcock, MD

By James Gross

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Jennifer Allcock, M.D. Dr. Allcock first came to the US in 1960, while in the middle of a pediatric internship. During this internship, she was struck by “the inequity of health care that seemed to exist here.” This impression was reinforced two years later during her pediatric residency at King’s County Hospital in Brooklyn, NY.

Dr. Allcock observed that,” having come here before as a VIP, I’d seen everything through rose-tinted spectacles. Then I observed [hospital] conditions as they really were. There was a shortage of nurses, there were no bandages, we had to break up boxes to make splints, it was primitive. And it [the hospital wards] were full of the very poor and the very sick.

Dr. Allcock had the option of accepting a position in Nigeria when friends of hers suggested a project closer to home: Buy a house in a run-down section of the Philadelphia neighborhood and service the medical needs of the neighborhood.

As Dr. Allcock noted, “we called it the ministry of being there.” In fact, no one knew she was a doctor for the first two years. Allcock and her colleagues found that the neighborhood children could not read, so they began to tutor them. They added to this effort by building a library, and later started a nursery school.

In 1965, eighteen months after moving in, Dr. Allcock had secured her medical license as well as scraped together enough money to purchase some medical equipment. She was able to placed her medical sign on the premises and began to accept patients. She faced resistance at first as people were not accustomed to a female physician.
As Dr. Allcock recalled, “nobody believed it. Doctors weren’t women and doctors didn’t rollerskate down the street. But the children knew me and trusted me, and they brought their parents in to see me. We gradually built up a medical practice.

The facility eventually changed its name and is now called Covenant House. It operates out of two homes on East Bringhurst Street as well as two other modular clinical units. The clinic has 32 full time staff members, including four physicians. It operates on a sliding fee schedule and runs on a break-even basis.

As time went by, Dr. Allcock’s principal activities changed from her early days of being an active physician to that of its executive and medical director. As she noted, “I traded in my stethoscope for a calculator.” Dr. Allcock is credited with directing fundraising efforts to support the operating expenses of Covenant House.

Dr. Allcock served as the director of the Covenant House Health Services for 25 years. She later relocated to Connecticut where she pursued a M.A. in Landscape Design. She later participated in the Guilford Conservation Commission from 2004-2010 and served as its Chairperson for five of those years.

Dr. Allcock has led many conservation initiatives in the town of Guilford, CT and served as a Director of the American Chestnut Foundation’s Connecticut chapter. In 2010, she was the recipient of the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commission’s (CACIWC) “Conservation Commissioner of the Year” award.

Dr. Jennifer Allcock was awarded the Philadelphia award in 1984. The award citation praised Dr. Allcock as one who,” has set a model for health care practitioners and institutions throughout Philadelphia and beyond.”
References:


