

A Centennial of Caring

It's the oldest organization of its kind in Maryland and believed to be the first one established in the United States. This year the Woman's Auxiliary Board of the University of Maryland Hospital celebrates 100 years of service.

In 1887 local physicians suggested that women could help in the "domestic administration" of the hospital. According to a history of the auxiliary's founding, hospitals, in the earlier days, were primarily homes for the poor. At the Lying-In Hospital, across the street from the main hospital, the women were responsible for such tasks as helping care for the linens and maintaining hospital supplies.

After two years of this domestic administration, these volunteers formed an organization to serve the entire hospital. In 1890 the Women's Auxiliary Board of Lady Managers was formally established. Their task? According to the Faculty of Physic it was "to assist in the charity work for the free patients."

Free patients were better known as the poor. In an era when Medicare and Medicaid did not exist only a small number of institutions, like University Hospital, provided care for the poor of the city. Physicians donated

their time, but money was not abundant. The auxiliary began holding benefits and other fundraisers.

Much like the volunteer hospital workers of today, in the late 1800s members of the auxiliary visited the wards and held parties for patients. Often these women took on the role of the social worker, following up on "free patients" after their discharge.

The present University Hospital on Greene Street was made reality in large part due to the efforts of the auxiliary. According to auxiliary historian Grace Logan Merlis, "They lobbied relentlessly from the turn of the century to the 1920s for a new, modern hospital. Endless trips to the General Assembly and the governor's office eventually produced the University Hospital of today."

The auxiliary has witnessed quite a few changes over the past 100 years. Activities and responsibilities once handled by the volunteer Lady Managers are now handled by paid professionals. Today, the auxiliary manages the hospital gift shop and sponsors an annual bargain bazaar, fashion shows and art sales.

While the role of the women's auxiliary has changed over the past 100 years, their commitment to caring remains the essence of their work.

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