

'Blue Baby' Operation

BALTIMORE (AP)—Thousands of babies may owe their lives to the fact no women's liberation movement was afoot in 1924.

Otherwise, Dr. Helen Brooke Taussig would not have specialized in pediatrics and 17 years later, help find a cure for the fatal infant heart ailment, "blue baby."

"It was one of those times in life when what seemed to be a disappointment at the time later proved to be a great opportunity," Dr. Taussig, a retired staff member at Johns Hopkins Hospital, said in an interview.

Dr. Taussig, 73, was denied an internship in medicine after her graduation from the Hopkins School of Medicine because one woman from her class already had been accepted for the post.

The school would not put two women in the same field, Dr. Taussig explain-

ed, so she decided to intern in pediatrics.

She stayed in the field for a half-century and despite her official status as professor emerita of pediatrics, still puts in eight hours nearly every day at Hopkins.

"Retirement has one meaning," she once told an associate, "you sink into your bed at the end of the day, exhausted, and hope that the phone doesn't ring until morning."

Dr. Taussig, named last week as the first woman master in the American College of Physicians, specialized in pediatric cardiology after she joined the Hopkins staff in 1924.

In 1944, she helped develop the first successful operation for "blue babies," victims of a congenital construction of the artery connecting the heart to the lungs, a defect characterized by the blue coloration of skin.

Dr. Taussig had learned

of a surgeon in Boston who had tied off a vessel leading to the lung. "Not being a surgeon," she said, "it gave me no difficulty to ask "If you can tie off a ductus, why can't you build a new one altogether."

When Dr. Alfred Blalock, a surgeon, came to Hopkins, Dr. Taussig worked out the details of the operation with him. The first successful "blue baby" operation was performed nearly 30 years ago and Dr. Taussig estimates it has saved thousands of newborn lives.

Though her life's work was with children, the white-haired physician never married.

"A person can't do everything she wants to in life and I've had other experiences that I wouldn't have had if I had married," Dr. Taussig said.

"Besides, I think I've been more of a success with what I've done than I would have been with marriage."