

At 67, Another First

Helen Brooke Taussig

THE tall, kindly white-haired woman with spectacles can still remember the days when people thought that the education of women was a waste of time. "My answer used to be that it was cheaper to educate a few women than to build a battleship," says Dr. Helen Brooke

Woman
in the
News

Taussig, "and a lot more profitable to the country." There are thousands of people today who can testify at first

hand to the soundness of that statement, for without Dr. Taussig they would almost certainly be dead.

In World War II, she and the late Dr. Alfred Blalock of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore developed the intricate operation—now named for them—to release the deadly grip of pulmonary stenosis.

As a result, most of the sufferers of the congenital heart malformation—so-called "blue babies"—were able to take up normal life and growth. Many now have children of their own, and not a few of those children are named Helen.

Yesterday, in the latest of a series of firsts she has accumulated in her 67 years, Dr. Taussig was installed as president of the American Heart Association at the group's annual meeting in Bal Harbour, Fla. She is the first woman to hold that post in the association's 41-year history.

Born in Massachusetts

Dr. Taussig was born in Cambridge, Mass., on May 24, 1898. One of her grandfathers had been a specialist in the problems of children with defective eyesight. Her father, Frank William Taussig, was a noted Harvard economist, and her mother was one of the first woman students at Radcliffe.

She studied at Radcliffe, where she was also a tennis champion; the University of California; Harvard Medical School, and Boston University Medical School. She received her M.D. from Johns Hopkins University Medical School in 1927.

She had already published several papers on cardiology while a student, following the advice of a professor who said, "It won't do you any harm to be interested in one of the Children's Heart Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

The young diagnostician was interested primarily in heart disease in children. One of the most vexing disorders was pulmonary stenosis, which produces a characteristic blue color in babies because of the lack of oxygen in the blood. A childhood be-



Associated Press Wirephoto

Still fighting the battle against heart disease.
(Dr. Taussig before her installation yesterday.)

devised by shortness of breath and enforced inactivity, followed by an early death, was the prognosis when Dr. Taussig took up the problem.

After years of study, Dr. Taussig developed the theory that the reason for the disease was congenital constriction of the artery connecting the heart and the lungs, which resulted in oxygen starvation of the blood. Dr. Blalock developed a surgical technique for bypassing the constriction, proving Dr. Taussig's theory and promising a cure.

The first operation, on Nov. 9, 1944, was a failure. The next, however, was a success, as were 80 per cent of those that followed.

In 1962, Dr. Taussig published a report pointing out the danger of Thalidomide, a sleeping drug, to pregnant women. Here was the first alarm in the controversy, and it did much to prevent widespread damage to unborn children in this country.

Among the honors she has received is the President's Medal of Freedom and the French Legion of Honor. She was the first recipient of the \$40,100 Thomas M. Rivers Memorial Distinguished Research Fellowship and the first woman member of the Association of American Physicians, a select 250-member body.

Dr. Taussig has retired from her teaching and clinical posts at Johns Hopkins, but still works daily at her research into rheumatic fever and a major project, the fluoroscopic study of the changes in the size and shape of the heart.