

Dr Doris Odlum, BA, MA, LRCP, MRCS (1890-1985)

Dr Doris Odlum, consultant psychiatrist, was a prominent Bournemouth Soroptimist. After a secondary education at Talbot Heath School, Bournemouth, she attended St Hilda's College, Oxford, taking a full part in student life, supporting campaigns for women's suffrage and peace. She excelled at sport and later became the first woman to row in a London University boat against Cambridge. She was also a reserve member of the National Fencing Championship Team. Doris initially trained as a teacher but then switched to medicine, attending St Mary's Hospital Medical School. Her studies here were interrupted by the First World War, when she joined the Women's Voluntary Reserve Corps and commanded a forage guard in the New Forest.



By 1924 she had not only qualified, but was specialising in psychiatry. She subsequently held positions at Lady Chichester's Hospital in Brighton, followed by appointments to Maudsley and Elizabeth Garret Anderson's, in London.

During 1928 she persuaded the Board of the Royal Victoria Hospital, Boscombe, to appoint her as a Consultant Psychiatrist. Her first application for the position was refused on the grounds of her sex, since they had never employed a woman at this level before. She prevailed and remained at RVH for the rest of her career. She wrote many books, including, "Adolescent and Child Psychiatry", and later endowed a research prize at the British Medical Association. She was a co-founder of both the psychiatric department and child guidance clinic at the R.V.H.

Doris was involved with numerous organisations such as the Medical Women's Federation, The Medical Women's Association, The European League for Mental Hygiene and was a Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. In 1947, Doris's energy and insight lead her to help found The Bournemouth Association for Mental Health, a charity now known as Dorset Mind. In 1948, as part of the BMA's Psychological Medicine Group, she helped convince the Government to include mental health treatment under the new National Health Service. She was also heavily involved in the formation of the Bournemouth branch of the Samaritans and in 1973 was made Life President.

Doris gave very interesting talks to members of SI Bournemouth, keeping them informed of developments in her field, and raising awareness of progress in the treatment of those suffering with mental health issues.

Dr. Odlum achieved great success in her career at a time when women had to struggle to be accepted in many professions. Her personality and persistence opened pathways for all who

followed. She proved that women could perform at the highest levels in medicine and make a contribution to developing national strategies in medical fields.

One of our members, Pam Baker, remembers Dr Odlum from her own time at the Royal Victoria Hospital. She describes her as someone " with a strong personality", but said that where her patients were concerned she had a " kind and deep understanding of their varied problems".

A worthy tribute to a remarkable woman.

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