



Dame Constance Elizabeth D'Arcy (1879–1950)

DBE, MB ChM (Syd) 1904, FRACS (f), FRCOG

Gynaecologist, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney 1923-1944

Consultant Gynaecologist, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney 1945-1949

Dame Constance D'Arcy was the first of only four female surgeons to be appointed to St Vincent's General Hospital in its first 150 years. Constance Elizabeth D'Arcy was born at Rylstone, New South Wales, on June 1, 1879 to Murty D'Arcy (d1912), a police sergeant, and Bridget nee Synnott (d1890). She was the youngest of nine children. She was educated at Rylstone Public School and passed the Rachael Forster Hospital Senior Public Examination in 1894. She was awarded a medal for general proficiency and was head girl in her final year. She subsequently attended The Riviere College in Queen Street Woollahra, a girl's College with a high attainment of academic success. She passed her matriculation examination at Sydney University in 1898.

She enrolled in Medicine at Sydney University and graduated Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery with 2nd Class Honours in 1904. She was one of two women in a class of fourteen. She undertook her first year's residency at the (Royal) Adelaide Hospital in Adelaide, South Australia, as the two teaching hospitals in Sydney, Sydney Hospital and Prince Alfred Hospital, would not accept women residents. In 1905, she became the first female Resident Medical Officer at the Royal Hospital for Women in Paddington, where she did her training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. In 1908, she opened consulting rooms at 207 Macquarie Street, and in the same year she was appointed Honorary Surgeon to the Royal Hospital for Women, the first woman to do so.

In 1919, she was elected graduate representative to the Senate of the University of Sydney, a position she held until 1949. She was the first woman elected to that role. From 1943 to 1946, she was the first woman to be appointed as vice-Chancellor. In 1922, she helped establish the New Hospital for Women in Surry Hills (subsequently the Rachael Forster Hospital in Redfern). D'Arcy was a member of the National Council for Women, which requested that the Sydney University establish a Chair in Obstetrics in 1922; and assisted the passage of the proposal, securing Government funding provided in 1924. She lectured in Clinical Obstetrics at the University of Sydney from 1925 to 1939. In 1923, she was a member of the Senate that assessed and ratified the application from St Vincent's Hospital to have a Clinical School and become a Teaching Hospital. She was appointed Gynaecologist to St Vincent's Hospital at this time.

She was on several important Catholic and secular organisations. She was a Foundation member of Sancta Sophia College Council at the University of Sydney in 1926, continuing until she was appointed Chair of the Council from 1946. She served on the Executive of the Catholic University Women Graduates Association and was an active member of the Medical Guild of St Luke. She was a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, London and a foundation Fellow of the College of Surgeons of Australasia. She was President of the Medical Women's Society of New South Wales and on the Executive of the Sydney University Women's Graduates' Association. She served on the conjoint board of the Royal Alexander Hospital for Children and represented the University on the Australian Council of Hospital Almoners. In 1944, she became president of the

Business and Professional Women's Club of Sydney and organized the sex education work program for the National Council of Women. In 1935, she was created a Dame Commander of Order of the Order the British Empire for services to the welfare of children. The Pope also honoured her with the Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice in 1940.

Constance D'Arcy was a very good surgeon with a large practice. When she joined St Vincent's in 1923 her very busy obstetric services was centred around the Royal Hospital for Women Hospital and Rachel Forster Hospital. Her workload was commensurate with her ebullient personality. She was especially well loved by the nursing staff at the hospitals where she worked and was always concerned about their working conditions. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian Nursing Federation.

She was greatly revered, for having achieved so much for Women's health in the State of NSW and Australia. She trained herself to be a good lucid speaker and was a sought after guest lecturer. In 1935, she gave the Anne Mackenzie Oration on "The Problem of Maternal Welfare, 1935".

Constance D'Arcy died of a cerebro-vascular accident in the Sacred Heart Hospital, Darlinghurst, on April 25, 1950. A requiem mass was held in St Mary's Cathedral and she was buried in Waverley Cemetery. She left an estate of £46,429.