



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN  
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



## November 2022 Her Story ENewsletter Surgeon Generals

The United States Surgeon General serves to protect the health of the country and is also the overseer of the United States Public Health Service. The first female U.S. surgeon general, #14, was Dr. Antonia Novello. She was also the first Hispanic U.S. Surgeon General. Dr. Joycelyn Elders was #15, succeeding Dr. Novello and she was the first African American U.S. Surgeon General. We feature both of these outstanding women physicians in this month's newsletter.



The first female U.S. Surgeon General and the first Hispanic to hold the office, **Antonia Novello** grew up in Puerto Rico with a medical condition that was finally corrected with two surgeries when she was 18 and 20. This experience galvanized her to study medicine; the death of her aunt of kidney disease when she was in medical school, determined her direction to nephrology (the study of kidneys). Novello was named the first woman Intern of the Year during her years at the University of Michigan. She joined the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps in 1978 and later served as deputy director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Novello was appointed U.S. Surgeon General in 1990 by the first President Bush. As Surgeon General, she focused on the health of youth, women, and minorities. Her efforts against tobacco usage included fighting the "Joe Camel" advertising campaign that she felt targeted children. She called the youth "a generation at risk." In addition, she worked to stop the spread of AIDS. During the Gulf War, she worked to expedite vaccines for military personnel, for which she received the Legion of Merit. She later served as Commissioner of the Department of Health for the State of New York. Novello has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Arkansan **Joycelyn Elders** spent most of her youth in the state. She earned her BS in Biology from Philander Smith College and obtained her medical degree from the University of Arkansas Medical Center. She served on the faculty at the University of Arkansas Medical Center, with a specialty in pediatric endocrinology. In 1978, she became the first person to be board certified in Arkansas in pediatric endocrinology.

In 1987 Elders was appointed Director of the Arkansas Department of Health by then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. He would appoint her United States Surgeon General in 1993. She assumed that office on completion of her term as President of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers. During her term of office as Surgeon General, Elders was outspoken about issues related to drug legalization and sex education. After her resignation from the office at the close of 1994, Elders returned to the University of Arkansas Medical Center as a professor of pediatrics. Today, she is an emerita professor.

Drs. Antonia Novello and Joycelyn Elders are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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