

**ESTABLISHMENT OF
NEW YORK HOSPITAL-CORNELL MEDICAL CENTER
(NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL/WEILL CORNELL MEDICAL CENTER)**

New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center opened for business in September 1932. On September 1, 1932, at 10:00 a.m., New York Hospital received its first patients; and on September 26, Cornell University Medical College began instructing medical students at the new complex. The impressive award-winning alabaster building towered over the Upper East Side neighborhood as a “temple of modern medicine” at the height of the Great Depression.

The Journey Begins:

The journey toward the establishment of this medical center began in 1912. Dr. Lewis Stimson, a founding faculty member and chairman of the Department of Surgery at Cornell University Medical College, and an attending surgeon at New York Hospital, along with George Baker, Sr., a governor of New York Hospital since 1899 and wealthy benefactor, facilitated an affiliation agreement between [Cornell University Medical College](#) located at 477 First Avenue and [The Society of the New York Hospital](#) located at West 15th and 16th Streets between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. George Baker, Sr. gave an initial donation of \$250,000 to New York Hospital. (Baker may have made additional donations as needed). The following year, the college’s benefactor, Oliver Hazard Payne, donated \$4,000,000 to Cornell University Medical College. This early agreement gave the medical college the right to nominate half of the attending physicians and surgeons and all of the pathologists at the hospital, as well as the use of the hospital’s medical and surgical facilities for the training of the medical students.

The administrators that led the effort to create the medical center included Livingston Farrand, president of Cornell University; Edward Sheldon, president of the Board of Governors of New York Hospital; Payne Whitney, philanthropist and vice president of the Board of Governors; and Dr. G. Canby Robinson, director of the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical College Association. The initial plan for the medical center came from the efforts of Edward Sheldon, Payne Whitney, and other governors at New York Hospital.

At the February 20, 1917, Board of Governors’ meeting, a report was submitted by the Site Committee that discussed the idea of merging New York Hospital, Presbyterian Hospital, Cornell University Medical College, and College of Physicians and Surgeons (Columbia University) into one medical center. (In 1921, Presbyterian Hospital and Columbia University joined to build Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center, which opened in 1928, on the Upper West Side. Eighty years later the two hospitals would merge).

On March 26, 1920, Subcommittee C of the Development Committee of the Board of Governors was formed to outline a plan for a medical center. Members of Subcommittee C included Edward Sheldon and Payne Whitney. By 1924, Edward Sheldon had contacted representatives from Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research with the idea of building the medical center next to their school located at Avenue A (York Avenue) and East 68th Street. At the same time, Payne Whitney had begun secretly to purchase property in the area of East 68th-70th Streets and Avenue A (York Avenue) for \$2,750,000. Sadly, Payne Whitney died suddenly of a heart attack

in May 1927; however, he had the foresight to leave financial provisions in his will for the funding of the medical center that included \$12,400,000 for the hospital; \$6,200,000 for the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic (the will specified either a neurological or psychiatric clinic); and \$2,800,000 for the medical college. Additional funding in the amount of \$7,500,000 came from The General Education Board of Rockefeller Foundation for the medical college buildings.

Agreement: Cornell University and The Society of the New York Hospital

The agreement between Cornell University and The Society of the New York Hospital to establish a medical center was signed on June 14, 1927.

In the affiliation document, New York Hospital agreed to buy the land and build a general hospital that would include facilities for patient care, the training of medical students, and research laboratories. In turn, Cornell University agreed to share in the costs of building and maintaining the medical school facilities. In addition, the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical College Association was formed. The Joint Administrative Board, consisting of three hospital governors, three university trustees, and a member-at-large, would administer the association.

The agreement established a position of director of the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical College Association. Dr. G. Canby Robinson was hired as the first director of the association in 1927. He was instrumental in developing and implementing the plans for the medical center. In addition, he was the director of the medical college at its new location. After the medical center opened, some hospital administrators and medical college faculty opposed him. He retired on October 1, 1934.

Lying-In Hospital and Manhattan Maternity and Dispensary joined the Medical Center

As word spread, two other institutions approached New York Hospital regarding joining the new medical center complex: [The Society of the Lying-In Hospital of the City of New York](#), and [Manhattan Maternity and Dispensary](#). Both institutions had financial troubles and wished to be part of this brand new medical facility.

John Pierpont Morgan, Jr., a benefactor and chair of the Lying-In Hospital Board of Directors, approached New York Hospital regarding absorbing the Lying-In Hospital. New York Hospital agreed to the affiliation if the Lying-In Hospital would pay \$6,000,000. John Pierpont Morgan, Jr. donated \$2,000,000 and received \$1,000,000 each from George Baker, Sr. and Jr., and \$2,000,000 from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation.

The affiliation agreement between The Society of the Lying-In Hospital of the City of New York and The Society of the New York Hospital was signed on June 19, 1928. Under the agreement, the Lying-In Hospital became the Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology (Women's Clinic) at the new medical center.

Since New York Hospital had already made an agreement with the Lying-In Hospital to become the medical center's Women's Clinic, the Board of Directors of Manhattan Maternity and

Dispensary signed an affiliation agreement on March 19, 1929 to become the medical center's Department of Pediatrics (Children's Clinic).

Later on March 15, 1947, The Lying-In Hospital of the City of New York, Manhattan Maternity and Dispensary and [New York Nursery and Child's Hospital](#) (which had joined the medical center in 1934) completed a formal legal merger with The Society of the New York Hospital.

Construction of the Medical Center

The Central Brewing Company and several row houses that were on the site of the medical center were demolished in 1929.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the new medical center was held on June 17, 1929. Present at the ceremony were Edward Sheldon, president of the hospital; John Hay Whitney, son of Payne Whitney; Dr. Walter Niles, dean; and Dr. G. Canby Robinson, future director of the medical center. The ceremony for laying the cornerstone took place the following June. The contractor was Marc Eidlitz & Son Incorporated, the firm that had built the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.

The hospital hired the Boston architectural firm: Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch, and Abbott. In 1933, Henry Shepley, the head architect for the project, won the Architectural League of New York's architectural gold medal award for his design. Shepley had considered several plans and designs for the complex. The Avignon sketch, based on the Palace of the Popes in Avignon, France, is similar to the final design.

The final plans included a 27-story central tower (F Building- Baker Tower). The first nine floors were designated for the general hospital of 459 beds (later cut to 300 beds); floors 10 and 11 for operating rooms; floors 12-17 for private patients; and the top floors for the living and recreational quarters for the house staff. Two pavilions in the front were for administration with men's (G Building-now Whitney Pavilion) and women's (H Building-now Payson Pavilion) wards on the upper floors. This was balanced by the outpatient pavilion (K Building) and the specialized therapy pavilion (L Building) in the back of the hospital. Facing the East River were the Lying-In Hospital (Women's Clinic) and Children's Clinic wings. Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic had its own building (now the site of Greenberg Pavilion).

The college buildings were placed on York Avenue so that the view of the river would be reserved for the patients. The medical college had four wings housing facilities for anatomy (A Building), bacteriology and immunology (B Building), physiology (D Building) and biochemistry and pharmacology (E Building). Along the central corridor (C Building) were facilities for the pathology laboratories, library, and administrative offices.

New York Hospital School of Nursing

The Society of the New York Hospital established [New York Hospital Training School for Nurses](#) in 1877 at its second location on West 15th and 16th Streets.

At the new medical center, a beautiful nurses' residence, which housed the school and living quarters for the students and nurses, was built.

Organizational Structure

Both New York Hospital and Cornell University Medical College maintained individual control of their respective departments and administrative operations. The medical center was structured on a university system with five major clinical departments: medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics & gynecology, and psychiatry linked administratively. In these five clinical areas, the chairs of the college departments were the heads of the corresponding hospital departments. The pathology and radiology departments of the hospital and medical college were also linked in the same way. (Radiology, however, had different heads at the college and hospital until 1939). Likewise, the majority of the medical college faculty in these departments had corresponding appointments at the hospital. The medical college continued to maintain its basic science departments of anatomy, bacteriology and immunology, physiology, biochemistry, and pharmacology, as well as a separate department of public health.

Since a mandatory retirement age of 65 was instituted for the professional staff, many of the top administrators, faculty, and attending staff at the medical college and hospital had to retire before the medical center opened. Drs. Charles Stockard (Anatomy), Robert Hatcher (Pharmacology), John Torrey (Public Health), and Stanley Benedict (Biochemistry) kept their chairs positions. (The Department of Biochemistry was called Chemistry at the old location.) Dr. Oscar Schloss, who was already the chair of the college's Department of Pediatrics, became the pediatrician-in-chief of the hospital's new pediatrics department. Dr. Eugene DuBois was promoted to chairman/physician-in-chief of the Department of Medicine. Hired from outside of the medical college or hospital were: Drs. George Heuer (Surgery), Henricus Stander (Obstetrics & Gynecology), Eugene Opie (Pathology), George Amsden (Psychiatry), Herbert Gasser (Physiology) and James Neill (Bacteriology and Immunology). Until 1939, the chair of Department of Radiology was Dr. Harry Imboden and the radiologist-in-chief at the hospital was Dr. John Carty. The heads of the departments and some attending staff and faculty were appointed full time. Additional part time staff and faculty were hired.

NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center Highlights

Throughout the years, the medical center has grown to become a premier health center. Some of the people who produced pioneer research or treatments were Drs. George Papanicolaou (Pap Smear); Vincent du Vigneaud (penicillin and Nobel Prize winner for research on oxytocin hormones); Harold Gold (heart drugs); Eugene DuBois (calorimeter/metabolism); Harold Wolff, (headaches, psychosomatic diseases and human ecology); Benjamin Kean (tropical medicine); Irving Wright (vascular diseases); John McLean (ophthalmology); May Wilson (rheumatic diseases), Carl Smith (pediatric hematology); Margaret Hilgarter (hemophilia); Maria New (pediatric endocrinology); Fritz Fuchs (obstetrics & gynecology); Zev Rosenwaks (infertility); Joseph Artusio and Alan Van Poznak (anesthesia); and Ade Milhorat (muscular dystrophy) to name only a few.

New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center (formerly New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center) has been a leader in medical advancements that included the first eye bank in the United States (1944) and the first kidney transplant (1963) and MRI machine (1983) in the New York metropolitan area.

The medical center patient care facilities include the William Randolph Hearst Burn Center; the Perinatology Center, the Rogosin Kidney Center (Rogosin Institute); the Thalassemia Center (oldest in the country, founded in 1944); the Blood Bank; the Center for Reproductive Medicine and Infertility; and the International Health Care Service.

Specialized research programs include the Institute of the History of Psychiatry, the Center for Special Studies (AIDS), the Stroke and Critical Care Research Center (first federally funded center of its kind founded in 1958), the Margaret M. Dyson Vision Research Center, and the Howard Gilman Institute for Valvular Heart Diseases.

In 1998, the medical college was renamed Joan and Sanford I. Weill Medical College of Cornell University (now shortened to Weill Cornell Medical College). New York Hospital and Presbyterian Hospital merged in 1997 to form New York-Presbyterian Hospital with two distinct medical centers (New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center and New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center) that brought to full circle the vision of unity that had begun in 1917.