



## M. Vera Peters, MD

Dr. Mildred Vera Peters is most notably recognized as an outstanding clinical investigator who changed the management of Hodgkin's disease and breast cancer. In addition, her legacy as a clinician and her deep desire to know and involve her patients in decision-making marks her as a truly unique and compassionate innovator who was ahead of her time.

One cannot fully appreciate the impact of Dr. Peters' work without taking into account the challenges she faced as a female in an era when women were not universally accepted as scientists. To graduate in the 1930's from medical school and emerge out of the 1960's as a world-class figure in oncology is a testament to her dogged determination and ingenuity.

Claiming that research isn't a question of time but a matter of curiosity, Dr. Peters was a great observer who was driven by the need to explain all that she observed. In 1935, she joined the father of the discipline of radiation therapy in Canada, Dr. Gordon Richards, at Toronto General Hospital who suggested that she study Hodgkin's disease. This led to her landmark publication in 1950 that showed that a high proportion of patients with early-stage Hodgkin's disease – considered incurable at the time – could be cured if treated with high dose radiation.

From 1958 to her retirement in 1976, Dr. Peters worked at the Princess Margaret Hospital where her relentless pursuit of scientific truth with respect to treating early-stage cancer of the breast proved that breast-conserving surgery (lumpectomy) followed by radiation is as effective as radical mastectomy. Her findings in both Hodgkin's disease and breast cancer, although initially met with skepticism, became common practice throughout Canada and the world.

Married with two children, Dr. Peters had an extraordinary ability to balance and separate her professional and personal worlds – to the point that she was known as Mrs. Lobb at home and Dr. Peters at the hospital. Women then, today and for generations to come will continue to be inspired by this remarkable role model.

Dr. Peters was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in 1975 and an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1977. She was the recipient of the Gold Medal from the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology in 1979. Among numerous honours, Dr. Peters has been awarded two honorary doctorates (York University, 1975; Queen's University, 1983).