Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917)

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, like her role model Elizabeth Blackwell, did much to encourage the acceptance of women into the male-dominated medical world.

Who was Elizabeth Garrett Anderson? In 1859, at the age of 24, Anderson met the American doctor, Elizabeth Blackwell. The meeting inspired her to train as a nurse. She trained privately and was accepted into the British Society of Apothecaries in 1865.

How did she become well known? The acceptance of Anderson into the Society of Apothecaries established a precedent. Despite this though, the Society then changed its rules to stop other women becoming fellow members. However, this made Anderson even more determined to go further. She applied to British universities to train as a doctor, but was turned down in every case. Undeterred, she went to France and received the M.D. degree from the University of Paris in 1870. She returned to London and set up practice.

How did Anderson change medicine in Britain? Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was the first British woman to qualify as a doctor. In 1874 she established the London School of Medicine for Women. Her determination paved the way for other women. In 1876 an Act of Parliament was passed which permitted women to enter all of the medical professions.

What was her legacy to medicine? Even today one of the leading hospitals for women in London is named after Anderson as a tribute to her part in breaking down prejudice in the medical profession. One of the arguments that the Suffragettes were able to use in the early 20th century was that women, as doctors, could be trusted with lives, yet were excluded from the basic right to vote.