

## OB/GYN Menopause Author Reaches Out to Women

by Myrna Chandler Goldstein

By the time she was in first grade, Mary Jane Minkin, M.D., knew she wanted to be a physician. Though there were no physicians in her family, she really enjoyed visits to her pediatrician. She thought he had the most fascinating job—besides, she had no fear that she would be upset by the required laboratory dissections.

"My grandfather was a kosher butcher," Dr. Minkin joked. "And I did spend a fair amount of time in his butcher shop in the Bronx." So, Mary Jane Minkin did indeed become a physician.

Today, she is a New Haven-based obstetrician and gynecologist who is a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Yale University School of Medicine. She is also the co-author of *What Every Woman Needs to Know About Menopause*, which was originally published by Yale University Press. Dr. Minkin, who is 50, and her co-author, Carol V. Wright, are currently preparing an updated version of the book, which will be published by Rodale.

### CARIBBEAN INTERNSHIP CHANGED PLANS

Though born in Baltimore, Dr. Minkin and her younger sister were raised in suburban New Jersey. Their father was a chemi-

cal engineer and their mother, trained as a guidance counselor, conducted labor education programs for the state's Department of Labor. Their daughter, Mary Jane, sped through the public school system and graduated high school at the young age of 16. She continued her education at Brown Univer-

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sity, where she majored in biology.

"They were developing a very good medical science program," Dr. Minkin said. "I was particularly impressed that it included humanities. I was able to take a lot of liberal arts courses and work for the newspaper."

Following graduation in 1971, Dr. Minkin continued her education at Yale University School of Medicine. Having abandoned her plans to become a pediatrician, Dr. Minkin

initially thought she would enter the field of internal medicine. But following rotations in OB/GYN and a sub-internship in the field, she decided to redirect her focus.

"During the sub-internship, I spent three months in a busy 600-bed hospital in Barbados," she said. "I was there January, February and March. It was tough leaving New Haven in the middle of the winter for Barbados. But somebody had to do it."

Why did she find obstetrics and gynecology so appealing?

"There are very few specialties in which you can take primary care of your patients, and, then when they have a problem, you can fix it with medications, if appropriate, or surgery," Dr. Minkin said. "You can follow them throughout the process."

After graduating from medical school in 1975, Dr. Minkin completed a one-year internship in internal medicine and a three year residency in obstetrics and gynecology, both at Yale. She began to practice in New Haven in 1979. Since then, she has combined working in a private practice with hospital teaching.

### MOZART & MARRIAGE

Dr. Minkin's professional life was thriving by the time she turned 33, but she still hoped to meet her perfect match, marry, and raise a family. Since that wasn't happening in New Haven, she decided to look elsewhere. Eventually, she placed a personal ad in *New York Magazine*. The ad began as follows:

*Papagena seeks Papageno.* "Papagena is the bird lady from 'The Magic Flute,' the Mozart opera. And Papageno is the birdman. I knew that I would only be happy with someone who likes Mozart operas."

The ad generated about 25 responses.

"I gave many of them away to friends," Dr. Minkin said. "But, I liked the one from Steve Pincus. We grew up about five miles from each other in New Jersey. He used to play basketball with my sister's friends. I was Central Jersey Math League Champion in 1968. He was Central Jersey Math League Champion in 1972."

At the time, Dr. Pincus, a mathematician with degrees from MIT, was living in New Jersey and working at Bell Labs. Since Drs. Minkin and Pincus were both avid bridge players, she asked him to join her and some friends in a game. There was instant chemistry. They were married in 1986. Dr. Minkin and Dr. Pincus are the parents of two children, Allegra, 13, and Max, 11. Dr. Pincus is now a freelance mathematician who specializes in medical data analysis and time series data.

### Q&A ON MENOPAUSE

Dr. Minkin said that in the early 1990s, one of her patients, Carol V. Wright, asked her to co-write a book on menopause.



MARY JANE MINKIN, M.D.

"At that point, there were no good books on the topic," Dr. Minkin said. "We sat down one afternoon a week. We would talk and discuss issues. Then the transcript of our discussion would be typed, and Carol would put the material into a question and answer format."

Dr. Minkin said that some women say through menopause symptom-free.

"Twenty percent never have even on hot flash," Dr. Minkin said. "No one has been able to determine why they are so lucky."

But, that is not true for the vast majority of women. What are the most common concerns associated with menopause?

"One of the most frequent worries is 'Am I going to become like my Great Aunt Tillie?'" Dr. Minkin said. "They tell me that, 'Aunt Tillie was a nice normal lady until she went through the change. Then she went nuts.' I really think that a lot of these women who went crazy were really sleep deprived. Insomnia is probably the most insidious of menopausal problems."

Dr. Minkin said that women often have menopausal related bladder problems.

"They have leakage of urine and bladder infections," Dr. Minkin said. "Those problems are secondary to the vaginal and bladder dryness. Vaginal and bladder tissue are the bodily tissues most sensitive to a lack of estrogen." Other widespread problems are the loss of interest in sex, forgetfulness, depression and mood swings.

"It is good that people are now able to talk about these," Dr. Minkin said.

She said she discusses non-hormonal and hormonal options when patients come to her with menopausal symptoms.

When her book on menopause was first released, Dr. Minkin received a great deal of positive response. She was frequently asked to speak to community groups. In 1998, she began writing a monthly woman's health column for *Prevention Magazine*, which is owned by Rodale, and read by about 11 million people. That led to the contract to update her book.

Someday, Dr. Minkin would like to be Surgeon General. "Because I am very outspoken, I don't think it will happen," Dr. Minkin said. "And my husband contends that I wouldn't like all the bureaucracy. But, in the meantime, I did deliver Joe Lieberman's grandchild. So, I guess that is a beginning." ♣