Marcia Storch Dies; Women's Health Pioneer By Peter Passell

Nov. 15, 1998

Dr. Marcia L. Storch, an innovator in women's health care, died Nov. 9 at her home in Tenants Harbor, Me. She was 65.

The cause was ovarian cancer, her family said.

She was best known as a private practitioner who was widely influential in changing the rules of treatment for women in the 1970's. Until then, relatively few women practiced as gynecologists and fewer still in the field that came to be known as feminist medicine, in which women were encouraged to take a hand in making informed medical decisions for themselves.

"She was the first self-declared feminist physician," said Barbara Seaman, a medical historian.

Phyllis Chesler, a co-founder of the Women's Health Network and author of "Women and Madness," called Dr. Storch "both a pioneer and role model in feminist medicine."

Dr. Storch was born in Pittsburgh. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College and the Medical College of Pennsylvania. In 1971 she moved to New York City.

She directed the Adolescent Gynecology and Family Planning Clinic at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center, which provided treatment as well as information on birth control and sexually transmitted diseases to tens of thousands of disadvantaged teen-agers.

Before Dr. Storch, Ms. Seaman said, women were expected to take orders and leave the thinking to their gynecologists.

According to Ms. Seaman, Dr. Storch insisted that patients in her downtown Manhattan practice take an active part in deciding everything from what form of birth control to use to whether to attempt childbirth without painkillers. And she aggressively promoted care for neglected problems like premenstrual syndrome and menopause.

After her retirement from private practice in 1989, she sought a wider audience for her approach to medicine as a television and radio producer. She created specialized programming for family physicians on the Lifetime medical network, and later became the head of Ob/Gyn news for the Medical News Network.

Dr. Storch is survived by Jean Hewitt, her partner of 20 years, and a sister, Suzanne Storch of Inverness, Calif.

Marcia L. Storch wanted patients to help make the decisions.