

WISCONSIN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

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MARCI BOWERS

1958

City: Madison, Oconomowoc

County: Dane, Waukesha

Dr. Marci Bowers is an internationally respected surgeon who specializes in gender-affirming surgery and clitoral restoration.

Marci Bowers was born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1958, and was assigned male at birth. Her childhood in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, was very happy, but just before she started ninth grade, her family moved to a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, where she was bullied because of her feminine appearance. In getting through that hard time, she decided she wanted to help make people's lives better by becoming a doctor. She attended the University of Wisconsin–Madison for college, majoring in medical microbiology and graduating in 1980. She then went to medical school at the University of Minnesota, where she was elected class president and then student body president.

Dr. Bowers chose to enter the field of obstetrics (medical care during pregnancy and childbirth) and gynecology (the care of female reproductive organs). During her residency (a period of practice and advanced training after medical school) at the University of Washington, her fellow residents voted for her to receive an award for excellence in teaching.

Dr. Bowers worked as an obstetrician/gynecologist (Ob/Gyn) at the Polyclinic and Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, delivering more than 2000 babies, perfecting her skills in gynecologic surgery, and working in leadership positions. While she was chair (person in charge) of the Ob/Gyn department there, she quietly began the process of medically transitioning to female. In 2000, she became friends with Dr. Stanley Biber, one of the few surgeons at that time who performed gender-affirming surgery, who lived in the small town of Trinidad, Colorado, but was known around the world for his skill. When Dr. Biber retired a few years later, Dr. Bowers took over his surgical practice. She was the first woman with a personal transgender history to perform gender-affirming surgery. She became well known and respected for this work.

In 2007, Dr. Bowers learned how to perform clitoral restoration (an operation to give the clitoris feeling again) for survivors of a procedure known as female genital mutilation/cutting. She was the first American surgeon to learn to do clitoral restoration. She has now performed hundreds of the operations and is an international expert and teacher about the subject.

Dr. Bowers moved her primary practice to the San Francisco Bay area in 2010. She now does most of her patient care at Mills-Peninsula Medical Center in Burlingame, California. She has performed more than 2,300 gender affirmation surgeries, and she is dedicated to training more surgeons and making it possible for more transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people everywhere to get the health care they need. Dr. Bowers helped start transgender surgical education programs at Tel Aviv's Sheba Hospital, Denver Health, Women's College Hospital in Toronto, the University of California–Los Angeles' Children's Hospital, and New York's Mt. Sinai-Icahn School of Medicine. She continues to play an important role in Mt. Sinai's Transgender Surgical Fellowship.

Dr. Marci Bowers continues to fight for transgender rights and basic health care. She has served on the boards of the Transgender Law Center, GLAAD (an organization that aims to improve the quality of media representation for LGBT people), and the Trevor Project (suicide prevention for LGBT youth). She is currently President of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, a science-based organization addressing the health care needs of the TGD community. The Guardian named her as one of the 100 most influential LGBT people in the world, and Huffington Post listed her as one of fifty transgender "icons" (people who are looked up to as symbols).

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/marci-bowers