



Impact Statement

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The Resonance of Care, 2026

Printmaking on textile, 35 x 80 inches

Germantown Friends School, Philadelphia, PA

Unsung Heroes: May Edward Chinn

My choice to center Dr. Chinn's legacy in this screen-printed work began during my first week volunteering in Penn Medicine's Radiation Oncology Department, where walking through the halls and experiencing the clinical environment firsthand changed how I understood what care can feel like in a medical space. I noticed something unexpected that shifted my perspective of a clinical environment: vivid and lively photographs and artwork created by doctors, placed across the walls in the treatment spaces. Walking through these halls and interacting with the doctors working within the department made me more curious about how they engaged with patients and how care was expressed beyond treatment itself. In a place I understood as defined by science and urgency, I also found a complex community shaped by creativity and care. I have always understood art and science as intertwined disciplines that build on each other, but during my time volunteering in art therapy in this setting, I began to understand not only how connected creative expression and medicine can be, but how essential they are together in supporting human connection and healing. I began to think of this relationship as a kind of resonance of care where empathy and attention echo across both disciplines.

This experience pushed me to think more intentionally about the people working within healthcare who represent this intersection. I became especially curious about the history of cancer treatment and how it has evolved not only through scientific advancement, but also through individuals who shaped care for communities. While researching, I discovered Dr. May Edward Chinn through the Unsung Heroes site, a pioneering physician and cancer researcher whose work fundamentally expanded access to healthcare for underserved communities.

Dr. Chinn was one of the first Black women to graduate from Bellevue Hospital Medical College and built her medical career serving patients in Harlem during the early 20th century. She trained in medicine at a time when both racial and gender discrimination severely limited opportunities for women of color, and despite her qualifications, she was denied access to mainstream hospital systems. These barriers shaped the course of her career and, through persistence, led her to develop a practice rooted in community-based care.

Unable to work freely within many hospitals, Dr. Chinn established a private medical practice in Harlem to treat individuals who were often excluded from healthcare systems and had limited access to early diagnosis and preventive care. Her work focused on early cancer detection at a time when cancer was frequently diagnosed too late for

effective treatment. Through her practice, she helped bring necessary medical attention to communities that had long been overlooked. Her practice became a vital space where patients could receive care with dignity despite systemic inequities in the healthcare system.

An important aspect of her life that stood out to me was her background in music. Dr. Chinn studied piano in her early education and continued to develop a deep relationship with music during her time at Columbia University, where she accompanied musical performances, including figures such as Paul Robeson. Music was her first passion, and this musical foundation shaped her sensitivity to attention and listening. It helped me understand her medical practice in a new light: she was not only diagnosing illness but also listening deeply to her patients as individuals whose voices were often overlooked within larger medical systems. This idea of listening became central to how I interpreted her legacy.

My artistic vision for this project developed directly from this concept of listening and amplification. In my screen-printed design, Dr. Chinn is positioned at the center of the image with her eyes closed and one hand raised toward her ear, symbolizing focused attention. Surrounding her are layered circular sound waves that radiate outward, representing both the ripple effect of her impact and the way she amplifies individual experiences. Within these waves are faces transitioning between illness and health, reflecting the ongoing nature of her care toward cancer treatment and recovery. The darker surrounding space represents barriers that both she and her patients faced, while the central illuminated circle highlights the agency and presence she created within those constraints.

To create this work, I developed the composition through pencil sketches before refining it on mylar using Posca markers. I then transferred the image onto a screen coated in emulsion and printed it at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, where, with the support of the teen engagement coordinator, I was guided through the screen-printing process. The process of layering ink, controlling pressure, and building an image through repetition required patience and attention throughout printing. That experience itself taught me the importance of attention in action and the necessity of collaboration when creating.

Through this process, I came to understand Dr. Chinn not only as a pioneer in cancer treatment but as someone who demonstrated how essential empathy and humanizing patients are in shaping systems of care. Her legacy has shown me how change is built through creating social connection and community where each individual feels supported and heard, and how continued everyday acts of attention, though seemingly small individually, collectively create lasting impact. I hope to share this artwork and Dr. Chinn's story through my school's art show and within the Penn Medicine Radiation Oncology Department community. By presenting her legacy visually, I want to encourage connection and recognition of individuals whose contributions are often overlooked. This project has reinforced my belief that listening and the resonance it creates between people, spaces, and disciplines can be a form of radical care, and that human attention has the power to transform both individuals and the broader community.