



What are Gender Diversity Concerns?

Diversity amongst healthcare providers has been shown to be integral when addressing inequalities in healthcare delivery. Multiple studies show that having a physician workforce reflective of our diverse patient population helps patients receive better access to care and feel that their values and beliefs are better understood. Furthermore, this has also been shown to be associated with improved patient outcomes. Unfortunately, diversity disparities still remain in most medical fields, and gender inequality is particularly prominent in certain surgical specialties.

How are Gender Diversity Concerns Reflected in Orthopaedic Surgery?

Efforts have been made to increase the number of women in medicine to more closely reflect the general population. The percentage of women entering medical schools in the United States has increased from 11% to 48%, from 1970 to 2001. However, female representation within surgical specialties, and in particular orthopaedic surgery, is lagging in this trend. Women currently only account for approximately 15% of all orthopaedic surgeons in training and 7% of practicing surgeons. Within orthopaedic surgery, female surgeons are most commonly represented in hand surgery and pediatric orthopaedic surgery and least represented in spine, trauma, and joint replacement. For example, only 2% of joint replacement surgeons currently are female.

Specialty choice is largely influenced by early clinical exposure during training and the availability of mentors the surgeon can relate to and identify with. The lack of female orthopaedic surgeons is one factor that discourages women in training from entering the field of orthopaedic surgery. Female orthopaedic surgery applicants rank the presence of faculty mentorship as one of the most important factors when deciding to pursue a career in orthopaedic surgery. Along with clinical and research exposure, mentorship is critical for career development.

How Can We Close the Gap in Gender Disparity?

Over the last decade, great efforts have been made to increase the exposure of female medical students to the field of orthopaedic surgery early in their medical training. The Ruth Jackson Orthopaedic Society (RJOS) was established



in 1983, and one of its primary aims is to promote the professional development of women in orthopaedics and to support women throughout all stages of their careers. Since its inception 40 years ago, at which point there were only a handful of members, the RIOS currently has over 1,000 members, which is encouraging to show the level of support that continues to grow for women to pursue a career in orthopaedic surgery. More recently, subspecialty specific female committees have also been established. One such example includes the Women in Arthroplasty (WIA) AAHKS Committee which provides mentoring, networking, leadership and educational opportunities to promote trainees and surgeons at various stages in their careers.

These efforts provide a platform for orthopaedic surgeons to identify and support women who are considering entering the field of orthopaedics. It is also important for both female and male orthopaedic surgeons in leadership positions to acknowledge the gender disparity that exists in our specialty and make a concerted effort to “close the gap” by encouraging female students to consider orthopaedic surgery and provide the resources necessary for women to be equally included and supported in orthopaedics.

With the continued efforts of these organizations as well as mentorship on a local level, we hope that the gap in gender diversity within orthopaedic surgery will continue to decrease. Career promotion is also fundamental as we cannot just strive to recruit women into the field of orthopaedic surgery, but we need to help promote them throughout their careers based on their merits. As more women enter the field of orthopaedic surgery and fill positions of leadership, we can move towards providing a workforce that better represents the general population.

“I think it’s important to be intentional about your choices and to realize that you can do anything. For women especially I don’t think that there should be limits on areas of medicine or surgery and you should keep your eye on that focused goal of where you want to be and to really listen to your inner voice.” (Kristy Weber, M.D., First female president of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons)



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This article has been written by Alexandra Stavrakis, MD in collaboration with the AAHKS Patient and Public Relations Committee and peer reviewed by the AAHKS Women in Arthroplasty (WIA) Committee. Links to these pages or content used from the articles must be given proper citation to the American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons.