Award-Winning Women in Medicine Programs: University of Pennsylvania and Georgetown University

This Spotlight highlights two award-winning medical school-based programs for women faculty professional development. The University of Pennsylvania's FOCUS on Health and Leadership for Women is comprehensive, with a full-time dedicated staff, and relies on its annual budget, one of the largest overall on-campus budgets for programs to support women faculty. Georgetown's Women in Medicine program (WIM) has maintained the grassroots, decentralized organization of its founding and operates on limited financial support and volunteer leader efforts to develop programming. Both institutions have received the AAMC Women in Medicine Leadership Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to develop leaders in academic medicine.

Both programs were established in 1994 by a handful of women faculty through grassroots efforts. Each has received various levels of support and funding, and has used numerous strategies to sustain their initiatives.

University of Pennsylvania's FOCUS on Health and Leadership for Women

FOCUS was founded by a senior faculty member, Dr. Jeanne Griswold, within the Center for Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Its purpose in 1994 was to provide a multidisciplinary network to encourage women's health research. Three years later, the faculty of the Women's Center, the Dean of Women's Health, and the Dean of the medical school expanded the role of FOCUS to include a leadership and mentoring program. With financial support from the Dean and national agendas before them, FOCUS worked quickly to identify their audience and communicate the value of the proposed initiatives to department chairs and other leaders.

Today, FOCUS offers a wide variety of programs and manages an annual operating budget of over $250,000. A handful of committed women leaders are responsible for developing and carrying out the goals and objectives of the FOCUS program with input from an advisory committee of women faculty from many departments.

Leadership Lesson: FOCUS on Health and Leadership for Women

Pat Friedman, Virginia Steen, Miriam Toporowicz, Kate Taylor, Bonnie Green, Aija Shad, Karen Gale, Dan Sedmak, Marline Cole, Joy Drass at the 2003 AAMC Women in Medicine Leadership Award Ceremony

Learning to build and sustain a strong professional development program for women faculty: a leadership lesson.

1. Never be discouraged, continue to work toward equity, inclusion and career development for all women faculty; it benefits everyone.

Georgetown University's Women in Medicine program

Georgetown's Women in Medicine program (GWIM) was founded in response to salary inequities reported by women in the Department of Internal Medicine. Four women faculty leaders (Dr. Terry Taylor, Bonnie Green, Marline Cole, and Miriam Toporowicz) recognized the importance of strengthening women's support networks and building community within the medical center. Their grassroots efforts continue to reach out to the 400 women faculty at Georgetown University Medical Center. With limited support and funding, but rich in ideas, energy, and passion, the GWIM continues to make small, significant steps toward developing programs for medical women faculty at Georgetown.

The AAMC recognized the success of these efforts with the 2003 AAMC Women in Medicine Leadership Award, which received wide attention from Georgetown's leadership. Past president, Dr. Toporowicz said, “The national award helped legitimize our efforts to GWIM leadership. The award gave us an increased visibility across the university and renewed our efforts and energy for advancing women.” With new momentum, the GWIM continues to see the institution, yet can negotiate the full program to run the program. The group relies on teamwork to carry out a multitude of initiatives with a limited staff. One of their key initiatives is their annual Family Conference, a report and analysis of gender statistics for Penn medical faculty which is presented to all department chairs and senior leadership. FOCUS believes that these data have significantly raised the visibility, urgency, and legitimacy of gender equity concerns at Penn. Another key component to the FOCUS program has been the many conferences with national speakers where women faculty not only attend small group mentoring and faculty development sessions and network, but also hear from nationally recognized speakers about key concepts in gender equity in plenary sessions.

Lessons in Building a Strong Professional Development Program for Women

1. Be clear with leadership as to why the institution needs to invest in professional development for all faculty, but especially for women faculty.

Women now make up half the medical school faculty and, thus, a significant portion of the pipeline of talented faculty and potential leaders. Your message should be clear and simple, inclusive.

2. Develop a proposal for WIM programs that have broad interest and appeal. Align your program goals with those of your institution. Address institutional change for all faculty. Use other successful Women in Medicine programs as models and include issues of importance to everyone, such as supervising staff, planning for promotion and tenure.

3. A National View of Women in Medicine Programs

The AAMC's 2002 report on Increasing Women's Leadership in Academic Medicine outlines the importance of support for WIM programs in cultivating women leaders.

The 2004-2005 AAMC report on Women in U.S. Academic Medicine Statistics and Medical School Benchmarking describes the structure, funding, and activities of 109 medical schools Women Liaison Officers who responded to the survey in June 2005. Ninety-nine schools report ongoing support of professional development of women faculty. For those schools reporting funding, levels of support range from $200 to $250,000 (average of $27,197 and median of $11,500). Fifty-eight percent report a centralized organizational structure within their institutions. Thirty schools report some level of on-going grassroots or volunteer activities.

GWIM president Leslie Walker, M.D., is preparing for the next phase of GWIM activities. “Our focus will be on maintaining the momentum we started, building on our successes and broadening our reach. We have a great core group of faculty and leaders who are committed to continuing the work of GWIM and creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all women faculty.” Dr. Walker notes that GWIM's success lies in its ability to bring together faculty from all departments and schools to create a strong community.

Pam Saunders, Terry Taylor, Rosaire Verna, Ray Mitchell, Rhonda Friedman, Virginia Steen, Miriam Toporowicz, Kate Taylor, Bonnie Green, Aija Shad, Karen Gale, Dan Sedmak, Marline Cole, Joy Drass at the 2003 AAMC Women in Medicine Leadership Award Ceremony
Resources for Women in Medicine (WIM) programs and types of WIM activities are listed below:

Resources

- Administrative staff
- Designated office space
- Web site development and maintenance
- Publications and subscriptions
- Newsletter publications
- Listservs
- Exhibits

Activities

- Professional Development workshops
- Gender equity consultations
- Informal discussion groups – teas and brown-bag lunches
- Journal clubs for professional development
- Sponsorship of women faculty to AAMC and ELAM career development programs
- Regional WIM meetings and conferences
- Visiting professorships honoring women of distinction in science and medicine
- Programs for medical and graduate students and residents

- Valerie Clark