

CULTURE SHIFT: HOW THE PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN MEDICINE CAN ALTER THE HEALTH CARE LANDSCAPE

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WOMEN, LAW, & LEADERSHIP
INTERSECTIONALITY, ALLYSHIP, & GLOBAL SOLUTIONS
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WOMEN IN MEDICINE

- Women today are estimated to comprise **35-38% of physicians in the U.S.**
 - This is much higher than it was in 1970 - ***just 5%!***
- Despite efforts to diversify, medical school faculty remains 60% white and nearly 60% male
 - According to the American Association of Medical Colleges, women held just 25.6% of full professorships and 15.9% of clinical sciences permanent department chairs
- In neurosurgery, women only represent 12% of residents in U.S. and Canada – less than in general surgery, otolaryngology, thoracic surgery and orthopedics
- According to the American Board of Neurological Surgery, **women represent just 5% of practicing board-certified surgeons**
 - 219 ANBS-certified neurosurgeons
 - 25 full time academic neurosurgeons
 - ***And just a single female chair of a neurosurgery department***



GENDER INEQUITY IN UNDERGRUATE SCHOOL – A STUDY

Gender Inequity Begins at the Undergraduate Level:

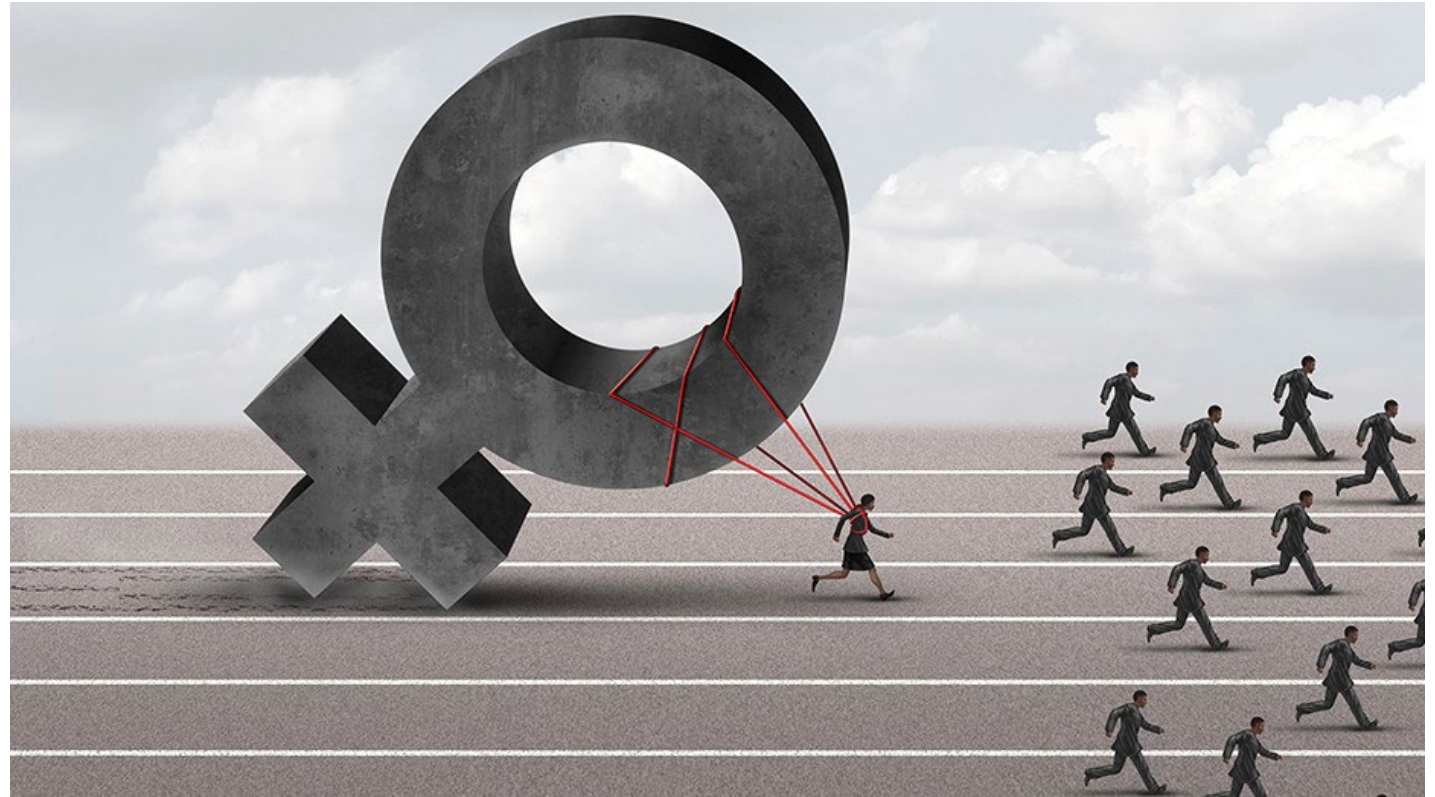
- Women drop out of the pre-medical track more often than men, **even when earning the same high grades**
- Compared to 65% of male students, **just 30%** of female students who received an A average in pre-medical courses took the MCAT
- Out of the **5,500** women who stated that during their first year of college they intended to pursue medicine, **only 194** sat for the MCAT



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What Causes This Trend?

- Scholars theorized that a lack of confidence in women's abilities grounded in an institutionalized perception by science faculty that **women “have to be a genius”** in order to continue on the pre-medical track played a role in holding female students back
- The “prove it again” bias – here students have to prove their competence over and over again to be judged as “genius” as men
- Talk about death by a thousand paper cuts!
- This is a substantial loss to the medical profession, especially considering if medical interests remained constant, women should be **overrepresented** in the medical profession





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- This issue is magnified when viewed through an intersectional lens
- **Almost 50%** of URM students dropped out of the pre-medical track, compared to just 17% of non-URM students
- Given the fact that **74%** of URM pre-medical students in this study were women, this is particularly alarming!
- Even after completing their studies, Black and Latinx physicians collectively represent **less than 30%** of the active physician workforce, and, of these, **women make up less than 50%!**



HIS AND HERS MEDICINE – HOW A LACK OF WOMEN IS A LOSS FOR THE PROFESSION

- In her famous TED talk, Paula Johnson, the current president of Wellesley College and a board-certified cardiologist, described the differences between genders in medicine as “his and hers medicine”
- Women are often overlooked because they can present different symptoms than males for the same conditions
 - Cardiovascular Disease – the leading killer of women; presents subtler, less painful symptoms in women that are often overlooked or misdiagnosed as less life-threatening conditions like acid reflux, the flu, or normal aging
 - Psychiatric Disorders – WHO reports women may actually be overtreated because other health complaints aren’t investigated thoroughly, although overall rates do not differ between genders → the “hysterical” woman
 - Pain – especially chronic pain is also often dismissed or not investigated; unsurprisingly, many of the chronic pain conditions for which we do not have treatments are more common in or exclusively affect women
- Because these differences are grounded in biology, she argues that this is an equal rights issue central to the “quality and integrity of science and medicine”

If the provider was a woman, how many lives can she impact?

THE IMPORTANCE INTERSECTIONALITY – HOW A LACK OF WOMEN IS A LOSS FOR THE PROFESSION

- When asked what skills and resources students need to succeed as pre-meds, the students listed **determination, perseverance, and hard work as the top three**
 - These are the very same skills the Harvard Graduate School of Education lists as the **cardinal strengths** of URM and immigrants in the U.S.
- The soft skills cited by the students – **grounding, compassion, and humility** – are exactly the interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence that Deborah Rhode mentions are lacking among individuals who shine intellectually and analytically



THE SOLUTION – HOW TO INCREASE THE PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN MEDICINE

Support, Allyship & Role Modeling → Change the Culture from the Inside Out

- 3/4ths of undergraduate students who had their interest levels in medicine decreased cited the unsupportive competitive culture of large pre-medical science courses as a factor that led to their decision to leave the pre-med pipeline
- Whereas URM men and women were equally likely to mention the importance of a university advising system, women were nearly three times more likely to mention the importance of peer and faculty support as a principal factor in finding success in the pre-medical pipeline
- By contrast, having contact with a physician during the first two years of college encouraged students to maintain their interest in pre-medical studies
- **Target pre-medical students and provide early outreach, exposure, and mentorship programming through institutional and community medical partnerships → shape the competitive undergraduate culture into one where women, especially intersectional women, can see themselves represented and supported (if you can see it, you can be it) and one that is reflective of the collaborative, rather than competitive nature of medical practice**
- **By providing support through early, personalized pre-medical academic and wellness counseling, institutions can counteract the competitive culture from the top down**
- **Create affinity and support groups that specifically target those pursuing a pre-medical track**

Reform → Grading Policy Reform is the Necessary First Step in Addressing the Leaky Pipeline

- Cut-throat competitive culture cannot change through simple support if institutions themselves do not change → **reflect on the harsh grading schemes of the pre-medical curriculum and how this affects and shapes students and school culture**

WHEN WOMEN ARE REPRESENTED AND LEAD...

- Through support, allyship, modeling and reform what **Tonye Cole**, Transformational Leadership Fellow at University of Oxford, called the “shame [of] denying her, the world... and [everyone] she has come in contact with of her gifts and brains” will be a bygone memory
- Cradled in a new framework, women, especially underrepresented and intersectional women, will no longer be what Professor **Kenneth W. Mack**, Inaugural Lawrence D. Biele Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, referred to as “prisoner[s] of caste,” but introduced as leaders in the field who can help transform the health care landscape to a place where “his and hers medicine” becomes just “medicine”

