

Who needs women as leaders?



The Women of Impact (WOI) for Healthcare started in 2013 with only 20 members. Since then the group – comprising of women leaders from diverse sectors of the U.S. healthcare industry – has met annually and grown to 65 members.

"Together, through our individual personal legacy work and our collaborative efforts, we want more women to imagine themselves as leaders and, with the benefit of a network to support and advise them, realise their aspirations within healthcare," wrote WOI members Vivian S. Lee, MD, PhD, MBA, and Joanne Conroy, MD, in an article for NEJM Catalyst.

A recent survey asked all WOI members this question: "What is the one policy or practice you have implemented (or seen implemented) that you feel has had the greatest impact on improving equity, especially gender equity, in the workplace?" The synthesis of the 28 responses is discussed in the Catalyst article, with the addition of the co-authors' collective experiences, to propose a workplace checklist meant for advancing equity in the healthcare environment.

Leadership

Diversity among a group of problem solvers improves the quality of solutions, especially when the problems are complex. Beyond the benefits of broader perspectives, leaders with diverse backgrounds shape the culture of their organisations both implicitly and explicitly. For example, one woman executive in academic medicine described the importance of knowing something personal (hobbies, family, pets) about everyone in her clinical department, even if the number is over 100. This kind of leadership style can influence culture subtly and effectively.

Recruitment

Workplace diversity relies on effective mechanisms of recruitment. WOI respondents cited the importance of standardising interview questions and processes so that each candidate is treated consistently. Other simple interventions include not allowing pictures on resumes and using initials instead of first names on applications to avoid gender and other biases.

Workplace Equity

Multiple women executives cited focused efforts to address salary equity, such as (1) peg compensation to fixed standards, and (2) regularly analyse salary data for new hires, current employees, and leadership on an annual basis. Several WOI respondents addressed policies that inadvertently reinforce bias and gender-related career penalties. For example, where maternal or paternal leave or flexible job-share/part-time work arrangements are considered one-off exceptions or opt-in arrangements, they may be construed as detrimental to career advancement.

Visibility, Recognition, and a Seat at the Table

A number of WOI leaders emphasised the importance of systematically improving the visibility and recognition of women in the workplace, whether ensuring that women are in the "room where it happens" or at the podium in professional conferences. Another leader goes as far as to pay registration and travel expenses for women on her team to attend networking opportunities as a way to nudge them into greater visibility. One initiative, "No Women Left on the Rim," ensured that women literally took seats at the table and not the seats against the wall, regardless of their role in the organisation.

Although WOI is particularly sensitive to issues of equity and diversity, the authors note that the group's commitment extends beyond simply addressing gender equity.

"Promoting inclusiveness and transparency with our words, actions, and policies is not intended to reflect advocacy for one group at the expense

of another. Our aim is to raise the standards of equity and overall wellness in our workplaces so that our organisations can more effectively advance health for the populations we serve," the authors wrote.

Source: [NEJM Catalyst](#)

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