

Improving university recruitment process may increase female surgical faculty

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New research published in the June issue of the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* shows that improving the university recruitment strategy and process could raise the number of women faculty in medicine. The study also suggests that specific procedural steps could assist in identifying and actively recruiting qualified women for faculty positions in surgery departments.

Despite equaling or exceeding the number of men in medical schools, women continue to be underrepresented in academic medicine. Less than one-third of physicians holding academic appointments nationwide are women. Women surgeons, in particular, make up 16 percent of faculty at university medical centers nationwide, but are nearly absent in leadership positions, with only 2 percent of department chairs nationwide held by women.

"Although many of the social and cultural issues in recruitment of women faculty cannot be easily addressed, developing strategies for recruiting women and monitoring the retention of women faculty could provide a framework for improving these disparities," according to Seema S. Sonnad, PhD, Director of Outcomes Research of the Department of Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania Health System, Philadelphia. "Other institutions could benefit from conducting similar analyses of their recruitment procedures."

The researchers analyzed the effectiveness of the Gender Equity Initiative at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine by

conducting an internal review of recruitment and hiring policies; conducting interviews with division chiefs; and implementing strategies for improving recruitment, retention and promotion of women faculty as developed by a gender equity committee.

The researchers suggest that organizational processes, in combination with cultural stereotypes, insufficient effective mentoring, and constraints in combining family responsibilities with professional opportunities may result in a cumulative disadvantage to women faculty.

The Gender Equity Committee recommended several steps in improving the recruitment of women at their university, such as developing an annual report with a plan for faculty recruitment; devising goals for the recruitment of women faculty in collaboration with a division chief or dean; and monitoring the retention and promotion of women faculty. In addition, a formal group of senior female faculty was developed to meet with prospective recruits, provide them with resources, and offer peer mentoring.

When the study began in January 2003, 8 percent (seven of 83) of faculty in the department of surgery were women, in contrast to 13 percent nationwide. This number grew to 12 percent by 2006 and 15 percent in 2007, compared with 16 percent nationwide at that time.

"It is evident that although some progress has been made, room for a great deal of improvement still exists in the recruitment process of women faculty," Dr. Sonnad said. "At this rate of increase, it will require at least 30 years for the percentage of women faculty at our medical school to equal the current percentage of female residents in surgery nationwide."

Source: Weber Shandwick Worldwide

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