

Women in Pediatrics

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When we were sick during our childhood, most of us were cared for by our mothers; this nurturing characteristic of women plays an important role in pediatrics. That is not to say that some men are not nurturing—we all are better for knowing them.

The first woman physician was Merit (how is that for a fitting name?) Ptah, who lived in Egypt around 2700 BC. It is likely that she cared for children in her practice. However, it was much later that the first woman in the United States earned her medical degree from the Geneva Medical College in 1849.¹ Elizabeth Blackwell then studied at children's hospitals in London, Paris, and Scotland, and later returned to the United States, where she helped start the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. In 1872, Mary Putnam Jacobi, wife of Abraham Jacobi, started a children's ward at the New York Infirmary and was the first woman to become a member of the Academy of Medicine.¹

It was not until 1850 that Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, the first medical school for women, was founded. That was 85 years after The University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine—the first medical school in the United States—was founded, but for the first century or so only men were accepted. Only 4% of medical school gradu-

ates in 1905 were women; in 1965, women comprised 8% of graduates, and by 1985, the figure had increased to 31%. Since 2003, approximately 48% of medical school graduates have been women. So for the past decade, women have been graduating from medical schools at about the same rate as men.²

While women were not generally accepted in medicine, their role in pediatrics was more acceptable to men, who essentially controlled medicine. Perhaps this was because pediatrics was considered a “soft” specialty (whatever that means). I remember an incident when I was the pediatric residency director at Johns Hopkins in the 1980s that makes this point. One of the female residents asked if I would meet with her mother, who was unhappy that she had chosen the specialty of pediatrics. When I met the mother, she acknowledged being disappointed because she had expected her daughter to have chosen a field where she would care for “really sick” patients.

Rather than changing her mind with words, I took her on a tour of the Children's Medical and Surgical Center, including the intensive care units. Later, while sharing tea in my office, she began to cry and told me she never knew pediatricians cared for such sick children. I explained that,

Table. AMSPDC Women Pediatric Department Chairs

Name, Affiliation	Name, Affiliation
Judy Aschner, MD, Albert Einstein College of Medicine	Beverly Neyland, MD, University of Nevada School of Medicine
Alice D. Ackerman, MD, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine	Teresa Quattrin, MD, University of Buffalo State University of New York School of Medicine
Xylina Bean, MD, Meharry Medical College	J. Usha Raj, MD, University of Illinois College of Medicine
Yvonne Blasini, MD, Ponce School of Medicine and Health Sciences	Ann Reed, MD, Mayo Medical School
Valerie P. Castle, MD, University of Michigan Medical School	C. Joan Richardson, MD, University of Texas Medical Branch
Archana Chatterjee, MD, Sanford School of Medicine, The University of South Dakota	Cheryl Rockman-Greenberg, MD, FRCPC, FCCMG, University of Manitoba
Loretta Cordova de Ortega, MD, University of New Mexico School of Medicine	Rita M. Ryan, MD, Medical University of South Carolina College of Medicine
Sherin Devaskar, MD, UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) David Geffen School of Medicine	Lisa Satlin, MD, Mount Sinai School of Medicine
Allison Eddy, MD, University of British Columbia	Judith L. Schaechter, MD, University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine
Patricia J. Emmanuel, MD, University of South Florida College of Medicine	Nina F. Schor, MD, PhD, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry
Donna M. Ferriero, MD, University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine	Robin H. Steinhorn, MD, University of California, Davis, School of Medicine
Susan Gilmour, MD, MSc, FRCPC, University of Alberta	Barbara J. Stoll, MD, Emory University School of Medicine
Ildy M. Katona, MD, University of Calgary	Yasmin Tyler-Hill, MD, Morehouse School of Medicine
Mary Lee, MD, University of Massachusetts Medical School	Cathy Vardy, MD, FRCPC, Memorial University Newfoundland
Catherine Scott Manno, MD, New York University School of Medicine	Ellen R. Wald, MD, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health
Margaret McGovern, MD, PhD, School of Medicine at Stony Brook University	Patricia Whitley-Williams, MD, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-Robert Wood Johnson

Abbreviation: AMSPDC, Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs.

while it was not as sexy, we also did much to prevent serious illnesses and suffering in children. She left feeling very proud of her daughter.

Women have often historically chosen pediatrics as their primary specialty. Since its inception in 1933, the American Board of Pediatrics has certified 108 879 pediatricians, of whom 51% have been women. Interestingly, 84% of certifications revoked by the American Board of Pediatrics involved men.³ One might wonder what, if anything, that says about those male pediatricians. No matter, because the total number of revocations is so small (only 304 of 108 879) that it speaks very well for pediatricians.

Currently, 30% of all active physicians in the United States are women, but 58% of the 55 509 pediatricians and 50% of the 3844 internal medicine pediatricians are women. The only other specialty that comes close is obstetrics and gynecology, in which 47% of the 40 377 members are women.² The trend continues: 72% of current pediatric residents and fellows are women, second only to the smaller field (in numbers, not stature) of obstetrics and gynecology at 81%.²

Women pediatricians have received leadership roles, awards, or acknowledgments less often than would be expected proportionally to their contributions and numbers. For example, very few pediatricians know of Mary Putnam Jacobi, while almost all know Abraham Jacobi, if only by name. Of the 151 members of the Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs, only 32 (21%) are women, including 28 of 138 in the United States and 4 of 13 in Canada (Table). Only 1 of the 13 women medical school deans, Nancy Andrews, is a pediatrician.

The Joseph St Geme Award is voted on by all the major pediatric organizations. It started in 1988, with Samuel Katz being the first recipient, but only 4 of the 27 awards (15%) have been presented to women. However, 3 of the past 10 have been awarded to women: Carol Berkowitz, Gail McGuinness, and Renee Jenkins. The Howland Award, provided by the American Pediatric Society, began in 1952, with Edwards Park being the first recipient. This award has been given to 65 pediatricians, but only 8 (12%) have been presented to women. However, 3 of the past 10 recipients have been women: Mary Ellen Avery, Elizabeth McAnarney, and Rebecca Buckley. So women pediatricians can look to the future with great hope for recognition and leadership roles.

Some argue that women pediatricians work fewer hours per week than male pediatricians and take off months or years for child bearing and caring and therefore do not contribute as much as men. However, it can also be argued that men have more serious illnesses in later life and live an average of 2 to 3 years less than women. Therefore, the overall total work hours might not be all that different. In any case, until men can bear children (not likely to happen), this is a moot point. In fact, if women stopped bearing children, there soon would be no need for pediatricians or, in fact, physicians.

Women pediatricians have always and will continue to play a significant and important role in pediatrics. We can look to the future with confidence that advances will be made to the health and well-being of children, and women will contribute substantially. So it is onward to the future of pediatrics.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Correction: This article was corrected on February 2, 2015, for a typographical error.

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