Profiles in Excellence: Female Physicians

This month’s profile in excellence is a reflection on the past and future of female physicians by Claire Wolfe, MD. The article serves as a companion piece to the 2004 James Warren Memorial lecture, “Profiles in Determination: Women in the Surgical Profession,” by Olga Jonasson, scheduled for April 29, 2004 from 4:30-5:30 at the Medical Heritage Center.

If you would like to suggest a subject for this column or contribute to this feature, please contact Judith Wiener at: wiener.3@osu.edu or (614)292-9273.

Women in Medicine: The Saga Continues

So, tell me: does anything in life ever change? Really? Or do things just keep going “déjà vu all over again?”

Times have, of course, changed including the house of medicine. The first American medical school was established in 1767, but the first woman, Elizabeth Blackwell, was not admitted until 80 years later, in 1847. Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia was the last school in the country to open its doors to women, in 1960! But Jefferson has come around quickly: in 2003, 51.5% of the entering class was women.

Should we heed any words of caution from history? Did you know that in the late 1800’s, women comprised 10% of the practicing physicians? By 1920, they had all but disappeared from medical schools and practice. They stayed at 5% of all physicians for 50 more years. Could the same thing happen again?

Well, probably not. These days, sheer numbers should prevent déja vu. There are indeed revolutionary changes in the numbers of women applying to and being accepted for medical school. For the first time in 2003, over 50% (50.8% to be exact) of the applicants, and 49.7% of the matriculants, were women. Some remarkable numbers: 62% of the entering 2003 class at UCLA, 66.7% at Berkeley, 50.9% at Yale, 52.4% at Georgetown, 54.4% at Johns Hopkins, and 38.4% at OSU.

Women currently make up more than 40 percent of all residents and fellows. By 2010, 30% of the practicing physicians will be women, an increase from 7.5% in 1970 and 25.2% in 2002.

However, other facts haven’t changed as dramatically: the income of women in medicine remains consistently lower than that of men, even when allowances are made for years in practice and specialty. Some of the disparity may relate to the large numbers of women versus men in primary care specialties versus surgery, but the income disparity remains even with per visit incomes.

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Women in Medicine (From page 1)

The vast majority of women in residency today are in internal medicine, pediatrics, family practice and psychiatry. Although the total number of women in OB-GYN is significantly less than of the aforementioned specialties, women now comprise 73.7% of all residents in that field. However, women comprise only 5% of general surgery residents.

In academia, where mentoring and role models are so important, women remain vastly underrepresented, particularly in the higher levels of appointments and positions of authority.

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Although more women graduates become medical school faculty than men, only 10.7% of women faculty were at the full professor level, compared with 31% of all men faculty, and those percentages have remained steady for at least 15 years. Most women remain instructors or assistant professors. In positions of authority there has been an encouraging improvement in the last few years in the total number of deanships.

None of us should forget that women account for 51% of the U.S. population, they make three fourths of the health care decisions in American households and spend almost two out of every three health care dollars. More than 61% of physician visits are made by women, 59% of prescription drugs are purchased by women, and 75% of nursing homes residents over the age of 75 are women.

Perhaps we have come a long way, but there are still continued inequities in salary and under-representation in leadership of organized medicine and academia and decreased access to certain specialties. Although it’s gotten better, women still find themselves calling for gender neutral language, some reasonable accommodation for pregnancy and child-rearing, and help with the last vestiges of sexual harassment.

New Faces at the MHC

The Medical Heritage Center would like to introduce you to a few new fresh faces at the Center.

Kate Charlesworth-Miller joined the Medical Heritage Center staff in January as the new MHC Scheduling Coordinator. It is Charlesworth-Miller’s job to manage the MHC meeting room facilities and make sure the approximately 200 events each year run smoothly. She also provides skilled administrative support to the MHC.

Charlesworth-Miller received a BA in English/Creative Writing from Fordham University, New York and has worked for The Ohio State University for three years.

She states that, “the things that make this job so rewarding for me are working with the varied types of people who book the MHC for events, and assisting in the success of the MHC as an independent unit. I am very happy to be working here, and hope to continue to expand my usefulness in the future.”

Mary M. Manning began her responsibilities as the new MHC Project Archivist in March. Manning will continue the processing of the William G. Myers archival collection and served as the Myers intern during Summer 2003.

Manning has a BA in English with a minor in Art History from University of Houston, a MA in English with a focus in Folklore from The Ohio State University and is soon to graduate from the Kent State School for Library and Information Science with a focus in special collections, archives, and preservation.

Manning says that she is, “pleased to continue my employment at the center as the new Project Archivist. I am excited to continue working at The Ohio State University and look forward to learning more about the history and culture of medicine in central Ohio. My son Ian is very glad that we can stay here in Columbus, Ohio, a city we have both come to love!”
MHC to Host National Exhibit

The Medical Heritage Center will host the Legacy of Heroes National Traveling Exhibit from September 24 to October 7, 2004. The exhibit was developed by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons and tells the stories of orthopedic surgeons who served in WWII and chronicles the advances made in the specialty during that period.

A slate of exhibit programming is being developed. Watch for further information in the next issue of House Call.

Nursing Lecture Slated for May

A Medical Heritage Center Nursing Lecture is scheduled for May 11, 2004 at the Medical Heritage Center.

Mary Ann Burnam, Ph.D, RN, professor of nursing, Otterbein College, will discuss the life of nurse and social reformer Lavinia L. Dock (1858-1956).

Dock, a graduate of Bellevue Training School for Nurses in 1886, and a pioneer in public health nursing, was the subject of Burnam’s doctoral dissertation.

A reception will precede the lecture. The event is co-sponsored by the MHC Friends of Nursing History with additional support from the Ohio State University College of Nursing Alumni Society.
Recent Donations

The Medical Heritage Center thanks those listed for their recent support:

Bertha Bouroncle, MD: certificates, awards, and personal papers • Thelma Holmes, RN and Grant Hospital: nursing ephemera • Kathy Leppe, RN, MS: Nursing Books • OSU Alumni Office: books • Doris Perry: Army Nurse Cadet uniform, coat and purse • Charles Sinsabaugh, MD: books • Tennyson Williams: books

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Recent donations are currently on display at the Medical Heritage Center exhibit galleries.