

A New Focus on Women in Nuclear Medicine

Women currently make up more than 50% of the U.S. workforce. The composition of medical school classes is more than 50% female, as are many residency programs. One-third of full-time medical school faculty members are women. Even with this continuous increase in numbers, women remain far less likely than men to reach the highest academic or leadership positions as full professors or editorial board members. SNMMI has had only 4 women presidents in its more than a half century of existence.

Satoshi Minoshima, MD, PhD, chair of the SNMMI scientific program, had a vision to create a session to address the needs and interests of women. SNMMI sponsored its first program on “Women in Nuclear Medicine” on June 9 at the 61st Annual Meeting in St. Louis, MO. The meeting was well attended by many women and a few men in leadership positions in the society. The first woman president of SNMMI, Naomi P. Alazraki, MD, former Chief of Nuclear Medicine at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Professor of Radiology and former Codirector of Nuclear Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine (Atlanta, GA), started the session with a presentation on “Statistics of women physicians and scientists in nuclear medicine compared with women in other medical fields.” She was followed by M. Elizabeth Oates, MD, Chair of the Department of Radiology at the University of Kentucky (Lexington) and a past-president of the American Association of Women in Radiology (AAWR), who spoke on “Women in nuclear medicine and radiology.” Leonie Gordon, MD, PhD, Professor of Radiology and Director of Nuclear Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina (Charleston), described, “The establishment of the Curie Fund to Advance Women into Leadership.” Yoshimi Anzai, MD, MPH, Professor of Radiology and Director of the Neuroradiology

Section at the University of Washington (Seattle) and current president of AAWR, spoke on “Experiences from AAWR and women in neuroradiology,” followed by an open panel discussion. The session highlighted the lack of women in leadership roles. Participants expressed enthusiasm for continuing a collaborative focus on initiatives to address these deficits.

As a result of the high level of interest among participants and attendees at the meeting, SNMMI leadership has formed a Women in Nuclear Medicine (WIN) Committee. The WIN committee is charged with promoting nuclear medicine and molecular imaging for SNMMI women physicians and scientists, fostering the development of professional interests, addressing problems encountered in the practice of nuclear medicine, promoting leadership and career development in women, raising awareness of scientific contributions of women in nuclear medicine, recognizing the challenges of balancing career and family, promoting fair and equitable treatment, and improving the climate for women in nuclear medicine at all stages of their careers. I believe this community will grow and form strong bonds. I recognize that we need to help women reach leadership roles, but we also must sustain them so that a critical and durable mass of women leaders emerges. I am hopeful that the formation of the WIN Committee marks the start of a number of organized efforts—such as a robust volunteer mentorship program—that can encourage and support women as they continue to make significant and long-lasting contributions to nuclear medicine and molecular imaging.

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Attendees at the special session on Women in Nuclear Medicine at the SNMMI Annual Meeting in St. Louis, MO.