

Something is Missing from AAEM

Megan Healy, MD
YPS Board Member



I'll give you a hint. Check out your March/April 2014 issue, featuring the new AAEM board of directors. The cover featured 16 (mostly) smiling faces, ready to take on the looming challenges that try our specialty. Photos of exceptional advocates, some of whom I have been lucky to work with, and some I hope to meet and learn from in the future. I'm glad to have

them at the helm and their positions are well deserved. Here's the part that bugs me: there's just one woman on that cover. She's the talented Meaghan Mercer, president of RSA, who serves as the representative for our thriving resident organization. But all the full voting members of the board are men. So as a female emergency physician at the start of my career, I can't help but wonder: who will be the voice for someone like me?

Per recent membership data, about 85% of AAEM members are men. And as for this last board election, no females were nominated. We have a long way to go to reach numbers that are more representative of our specialty as a whole. Women of AAEM — this is a call to you. I know there are great leaders out there — I've met them at Scientific Assembly, heard them give excellent talks, and seen them achieving at my own institution. I think empowering these leaders starts with simple steps — as basic as a nomination for a board position. Perhaps if we get more of these women at the table, we can begin to learn how to better support and retain their power and address the core issues underlying the gender

equity problem. Because as EPs — men and women alike — we all have a stake in issues like fair pay, job satisfaction, promotion, and work life balance.

The phenomenon of female under-representation in leadership is not unique to AAEM. It reflects a larger problem with the culture of academic medicine and traditional pathways of advancement. We have known for years that women are not progressing through the pipeline of academic medicine as expected. The AAMC's most recent report on U.S. Women in Academic Medicine (2009-2010) noted that the number of female residents in our specialty is rising: 40.6% in 2010, up from 27% in 1999 — and these numbers continue to grow. However, women account for 23% of associate professors and only 13% of full professors in our field. We have 19 clinical departments at the academic institution where I work: 100% of the chairs are men.

I joined AAEM/RSA as a resident, and remain a member of the Young Physicians Section (YPS) and AAEM today, because this organization was founded by pioneers who saw the problems within our specialty and envisioned something better. AAEM has shown itself over and over to be an organization unafraid of tackling big issues. I'd argue that the lack of advancement of women in our field is a crisis, worthy of attention and resources. We have a responsibility to all the bright and skilled female medical students, residents, and physicians at all stages of their careers to not only cultivate and retain their many talents, but champion and advance them to the highest levels of leadership.

With these facts in mind, I propose the development of a Women's Affairs Committee. The other EM specialty organizations are way ahead of us in this respect, and AAEM belongs at the forefront of change. SAEM developed an Academy for Women in Academic Emergency Medicine (AWAEM) in 2009, now 315 members strong. ACEP has a section, the American Association of Women Emergency Physicians (AAWEP), which grew out of a separate organization formed in the 1980s, Women in Emergency Medicine. The objectives of special interest groups like those I've mentioned include the recruitment, retention, and promotion of smart and capable women in EM. They also work to develop opportunities for collaborative research, writing, and building large resource networks that span other interests. By offering this type of professional development, AAEM can appeal to more women and make strides towards more diversity of ideas and talents, especially at the highest ranks.

I know there are reams of talented women EPs in AAEM who would jump at the opportunity to mentor, collaborate, and network with others in our field. If you are one of them, we need you. I'd love to hear your wisdom, work together on a research project, and learn from your experiences navigating our specialty. And I know I'm not alone. Let's get a few more female faces on next year's March/April cover — because to me, that's just common sense.

If you're interested in working together on the formation of a Women's Affairs Committee, please email me: megan.healy@tuhs.temple.edu. I'd love to hear your ideas. ■

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Letter of Response from the AAEM President

Dr. Healy brings up an important issue. I agree that our Academy would be stronger with more diversity and more female physicians in high-level leadership positions. Although we have significant female physician leadership in the Resident and Student Association (AAEM/RSA) and the Young Physicians Section (YPS), we have seen few female physicians interested in running for AAEM's board of directors, particularly recently. In light of this, shortly after becoming AAEM's president I reached out to three rising stars in the Academy: Dr. Lisa Moreno-Walton, Dr. Lisa Mills, and Dr. Leana Wen. I asked them to form a task force to bring recommendations to AAEM's board on how best to encourage and mentor female physicians to become leaders in the Academy. I also asked them if they felt there would be value in creating an interest group within AAEM geared towards female physicians. (AAEM had such an interest group years ago, but it became inactive and withered away). This task force met by conference call in early June and concluded that there is significant value in forming a Women in Emergency Medicine Interest Group. This interest group will create networking and mentorship opportunities, provide a voice on particular issues of interest, and groom leaders within AAEM. Drs. Moreno-Walton, Mills, and Wen plan to kick-off the Interest Group next February at the AAEM Scientific Assembly in Austin, Texas — likely with a networking event and a meeting of the working group. More info will follow as we get closer to the Scientific Assembly. Dr. Healy, I encourage you to join with Drs. Moreno-Walton, Mills, and Wen on this task force — we would love to get you involved in what we hope to be a great resource for our female members.

— Mark Reiter, MD MBA FAAEM
AAEM President

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