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“New England Women in Radiology (NEWER) Invited Lectureship Series” – A West Coast Perspective

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INTRODUCTION:

Gender-related career advancement inequity has always been present in academic medicine, to which radiology is not immune. Diving into the etiology of this issue is beyond the scope of this editorial but has been addressed in numerous prior publications (1-7). Although the etiology is multifactorial, intentional efforts at the local, regional, and national levels have been established to help equilibrate the historical factors which have led to career rank and leadership inequities still reflected in today's academic radiology departments.

OVERVIEW OF THE NEW ENGLAND WOMEN IN RADIOLOGY (NEWWR) LECTURE SERIES:

The New England Women in Radiology (NEWWR) Lecture Series represents a regional effort to mitigate gender-related career inequities (8). This program aims to generate speaking and networking opportunities for 20 nominated female junior faculty in academic radiology departments across 12 New England area institutions who were invited to travel to give a one-hour resident conference at another host institution. By participating in the invited speaking opportunities, these junior faculty gained teaching and speaking engagement experiences outside their own institutions, which will be seen favorably for future academic promotions. After one year of program administration, 100% of the respondent faculty participants said they would participate in this program again and 83% believed that participation will help them achieve promotion—reflecting an overall positive experience.

DISCUSSION:

Each institution and department have criteria that define the targets for academic advancement and promotion. While these targets vary among institutions, most share the core themes of the academic mission which include domain expertise, scholarly activity, and service to the local and broader academic community. The successful academician is expected to have a rising trajectory in these domains. It takes many years to become a well-recognized content expert within one's field. Those who are highly renowned have often participated in numerous research projects and have gained local recognition before they are invited for more regional, national, or international speaking opportunities. This program has intentionally focused on early career faculty. In so doing, junior faculty gain earlier career opportunities to speak in regional invited forums. Clear and obvious positive outcomes of this program are networking opportunities and added support to meet academic targets. Perhaps less tangible, but of similar importance may be the positive experience and excitement generated from sharing domain expertise outside one's home institution. Such experiences can be motivating factors for those who gain personal and professional satisfaction from positive shared academic interactions and could serve as a compelling motivation for retention in an academic position.

This program theoretically lends itself well to aid the faculty to broaden their network, though the effect may have been curtailed by the onset of COVID-19 as several lectures were converted to a virtual format during the pandemic. Interestingly, only 58% of respondents found networking opportunities in this program valuable. This may reflect the absence of meaningful faculty-to-faculty engagement for the lecture series. Depending on the clinical workflow and demands, faculty at the host institution may not have been able to attend and

participate in the conference. This is a substantial opportunity for the program to identify a mechanism for the invited faculty to interact with colleagues. However, networking may have been more fruitful for trainees who had an opportunity to speak with the invited lecturer, opening potential faculty-trainee mentorship relationships, and creating a substantial downstream positive of the program that could be formally interrogated in future years. We look forward to seeing how this program's post-COVID era adaptation and expansion will perform.

OUR WEST COAST PERSPECTIVE:

We enjoyed learning how this program invested in regional collaboration and combined forces to create a meaningful opportunity for academic advancement and professional satisfaction for female junior radiology faculty. We congratulate the authors on a successful program. Key factors for success in the current academic and medical environment would certainly include the ease of administration. The northeast does have an advantage for such a large-scale multi-institutional program as there are numerous academic departments within close vicinity. Even for those with geographic challenges, the program outlines a mechanism for virtual engagement. While it may not optimize personal interaction, virtual engagement has substantial advantages for inclusion and access.

This is a wonderful way to share ideas, meet new people, and diversify the teaching and learning opportunities for all involved. Adaptations in other regions such as ours may involve fewer programs, but potentially more faculty, and could be expanded to more than noon case conferences for residents. We recognize this program as beneficial to both faculty and trainees, facilitating the foundation of a network of potential collaborators, colleagues, mentors, and sponsors who are not in their immediate sphere of contact or influence. Inclusion of radiologists at all levels—from residents and fellows to those in senior positions is integral to understanding challenges at all stages of the career and can provide both insightful guidance and lessons to all participants. In our own mentorship programs, we have included trainees at all levels, including medical students and undergraduate students. We believe strongly that we must stimulate interest as early as possible in the academic pipeline to make a substantive difference in the number of women entering radiology.

We have taken a slightly different approach at our institution for the mentorship of women in radiology. In addition to the regular American Association for Women Radiologists (AAWR) chapter meetings as a forum for all our faculty and trainees to meet and discuss topics pertaining to their life as a woman in radiology, we also have a subset mentor-mentee dinner series hosted by one of our senior faculty which focuses on the development of future leaders in radiology. Fostering local collaborations which allow for more regular gatherings with the same group of individuals provides an intimate setting for discussions on the issues of equity, work-life integration, and skills needed for academic success.

CONCLUSION:

Gender disparity in academic rank, salary, and leadership is still present in academic radiology. However, programs such as the NEWR Invited Lectureship Series and other similar programs serve to address the gender gap in academic radiology by providing an avenue for junior female faculty to advance their careers

and gain visibility in the field. This lecturer series is a unique pilot which could be adapted in other regions and has the potential to open visibility and to catapult junior faculty careers by helping early faculty gain teaching experience and broaden her professional network and professional growth. For the institution, it can extend the educational reach the institution has in its region. This kind of program early on may have long-term implications in faculty recruitment, retention, and career satisfaction, and may aid in building a sense of community within and outside of one's own department and institution. As we look to the future, it is important to continue supporting initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion in medicine and to continue recognizing the value of diversity within our evolving field.

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