



# Leadership roles for women in gastroenterology: New initiatives for the new generation of gastroenterologists

In many of our medical schools throughout Europe there are now more female than male trainees, and women are entering a wide range of specialities including gastroenterology, gastrointestinal (GI) surgery as well as radiology and pathology. Furthermore, a significant proportion of women are making major contributions to research and teaching in GI-related specialities.

As well as meeting service demands and performing research tasks, there are important leadership roles in gastroenterology. These roles include opportunities to take part in local, national and international discussions about how to improve organisation and training within the specialty, and to put forward the case to help maximise funding to improve health outcomes for GI diseases. Whilst the opportunities can be exciting, leadership comes with increasing demands which are often outside of the expected working hours. For many men and women opportunities for leadership coincide with a large workload and responsibilities for caring for their children and elderly parents. As a result, difficult choices arise as to whether to take on important positions in one's own department, or as a member of national and international societies and within policy boards including government.

United European Gastroenterology (UEG) is waking up to the fact that the contributions of women in their boards and committees do not reflect the changing face of medicine internationally. In 2015, only 12% of representatives to UEG's boards and committees were women, and a female UEG president is yet to be appointed. The UEG would like to ensure that women are nominated for these positions and that they are supported by their departments when they are elected.

To help ensure that opportunities are there for women in the UEG an Equality and Diversity Group (E&D Group) has been created, with the main aim of ensuring equal opportunities for its members and recognising individual values and expertise. One example of a practical suggestion made by the E&D Group is that the age limits for grants and prizes should take into account time spent on maternity leave or caring for family members. As a result of this suggestion the UEG Council has agreed that applications for grants and prizes with an age limit should be adjusted to allow for an additional two years for each child for which the applicant has been the main carer (whether male or female). The E&D Group continues to meet and make recommendations to Council in order to promote equality (including, but not restricted to, gender equality) in gastroenterology leadership and to help fulfil the aspirations of young female members.

UEG is continuously seeking to provide outstanding opportunities for training and mentorship for trainees. Examples include the Summer School, the Young Investigator Meeting, basic research courses and many opportunities during the UEG week itself. Last year, for the first time, we held a lively discussion forum in the poster and exhibit area about how to maintain a work-life balance. This year the Women in GI will host a Hotspot Session at UEG week entitled 'A survivor's guide for a happy and successful career in Gastroenterology' and there will be a 'Career chat' in the Young GI Lounge. We hope that by airing the practical issues for men and women in gastroenterology we will help to inspire and encourage each other about how to combine aspirations in our personal life with the pressures and opportunities at work.

Young gastroenterologists have more opportunities today than ever before and there are role models to help guide you whatever your aspirations. Although there are areas that are traditionally dominated by males, like upper GI surgery and interventional endoscopy, women experts in this field would like to encourage young female gastroenterologists to embark on this career path.

We hope that many of our members will take the opportunities afforded by UEG to improve their leadership skills by finding the right mentor, participating in workshops and courses, applying for fellowships and getting involved in the activities of national and international societies. Do not wait to be asked – put yourself forward and you will be surprised about what you can gain from the experience.

## Acknowledgements

RF is a past winner of the UEG Research Prize and a member of UEG Scientific Committee.

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