

Research probes women doctors' "impossible task" of having it all

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There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed how so many people think about work and home—and that's also the case in medicine. The pandemic has further amplified the imbalance of child care and household-management tasks, placing further burden on women physicians.

What is the pandemic's true toll on women physicians with children?

That is the question driving the research of Huma Farid, MD, associate program director of the ob-gyn residency program at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and AMA member K. Meredith Atkins, MD, associate dean of undergraduate medical education at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School.

Their research will get a boost, thanks to a grant from the Joan F. Giambalvo Fund for the Advancement of Women. The Giambalvo Fund is administered by the AMA Foundation on behalf of the AMA Women Physicians Section (AMA-WPS), and awards scholarships of up to \$10,000 to health care researchers to identify and address issues that affect women physicians and medical students.

Drs. Farid and Atkins aim to develop a framework for how institutions can best support these physicians, particularly early on in their careers.

“As women in medicine, we have witnessed and experienced firsthand the challenges female physicians face: changing work schedules, remote learning, isolation from our families, and a lack of consistent, reliable child care,” Drs. Farid and Atkins said in a statement. “The impossible task of balancing it all was made even more challenging during the pandemic, but there are ways to help support female physicians that we aim to explore and promote through our project.”

Landing the Giambalvo Fund grant made the doctors feel “heard and acknowledged,” they added. “It

has bolstered us to pursue this interest in the hope that we can use the lessons gained from the pandemic to promote physician well-being and retain female physicians in the workforce.”

During the pandemic, according to a *JAMA Network Open* research letter, physician work hours and income decreased with the percentage of full-time physicians dropping from 84% to 80%. At the same time, among physicians with preschool aged children, the percentage of full-time female physicians decreased from 18% to 14% while full-time male physicians did not change.

AMA resources on advancing gender equity in medicine and navigating physician employment during COVID-19 provide useful information as physicians navigate changes in light of COVID-19.

Every September, AMA-WPS celebrates women physicians, residents and medical students during Women in Medicine Month. The pandemic posed another set of challenges for women physicians to surmount. That is why the AMA thanks the women physicians who are tirelessly advancing equity and building on change. This September, the AMA is recognizing the endurance and strength demonstrated by women in medicine through the challenges of the past year while being an advocate and ally.

Intersectionality and bias in medicine

Evidence suggests gender and race/ethnicity independently influence assessment. But it is unknown how gender and race intersect in assessment in medical education. This is what principal investigator Robin Klein, MD, and her colleagues aim to address through a multisite longitudinal study. Dr. Klein’s team is this year’s other recipient of a Giambalvo Fund grant.

The team of co-investigators working with Dr. Klein includes:

- | Sherri-Ann M. Burnett-Bowie, MD, AMA member Kerri Palamara, MD, and Nneka N. Ufere, MD, all of Massachusetts General Hospital.
- | Ishani Ganguli, MD, Brigham and Women’s Hospital.
- | Katherine A. Julian, MD, Sarah Schaeffer, MD, and Vanessa Thompson, MD, all at the University of California, San Francisco.
- | Simerjot K. Jassal, MD, University of California, San Diego and Veterans Administration, San Diego.
- | Jennifer Koch, MD, University of Louisville School of Medicine.
- | Alex Millard, MD, and Brian Uthlaut, MD, at the University of Virginia.
- | Erin D. Snyder, MD, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine.
- | Anna Volerman, MD, University of Chicago.
- | Wendy Simon, MD, University of California, Los Angeles.

“Understanding the combined impact of race and gender on women’s experiences in medical



education and training is important to achieving true gender equity,” said Dr. Klein, associate professor of medicine at Emory University School of Medicine. “We are thankful for support of the AMA for our team’s work examining bias in assessment.”