

Women in medical schools: Dig into latest record-breaking numbers

SEP 29, 2021

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More women are applying to and entering medical school than ever before, according to recent data from DO- and MD-granting programs.

During the 2019–2020 application cycle—the most recent year for which data is publicly available—more than 53.5% of applications to MD-granting medical schools came from women, who made up 53.7% of the number of students matriculating. For DO-granting medical schools, the percentage of female applicants was 53.4%, and the number of female matriculants was 51.9%.

Those figures come from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, respectively.

“It is so encouraging to see the overall osteopathic medical school application and matriculation rates increasing for women,” said Robyn Phillips-Madson, DO, founding dean of the University of the Incarnate Word School of Osteopathic Medicine (UIWSOM). “At UIWSOM, more than 65% of our 2020 matriculants were women, the largest percentage in the nation. Because the COVID-19 pandemic is causing an unprecedented number of women to leave the medical workforce, it is more imperative than ever that we educate more women today to become the DOs of tomorrow.”

Learn which medical specialties have the biggest gender imbalances.

Work remains

According to data published in *The Wall Street Journal* recently, women make up nearly six in 10 students enrolled in college. So, the fact that medical schools are now accepting more women than men mirrors trends at the undergraduate level.

Despite continued increases in female enrollment—women have made up the majority of matriculants at MD-granting schools for the past four years—women remain behind in attaining positions of leadership.

A 2018-19 AAMC report examining the state of women in academic medicine showed that women were less commonly faculty members and advanced less frequently.

“The overall proportion of full-time women faculty has continued to rise since 2009, now at 41%, with similar increases at each faculty rank; yet, women make up a majority of faculty only at the instructor rank,” the report states. In addition, the report notes that while there has been a steady rise in the number of women department chairs over the past 10 years, women still make up only 18% of all department chairs.

An AMA member, Carol A. Terregino, MD, is senior associate dean for education and academic affairs at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, one of 37 member schools of the AMA Accelerating Change in Medicine Consortium.

“I am hopeful that with increased women entering medicine, more will enter academic medicine and have increased opportunities for leadership and advancement,” she said. “We need to redouble efforts to provide leadership training and opportunities for women medical students, residents and junior faculty.”

Read about new research that probes women doctors’ “impossible task of having it all.”

Fighting for women in medicine

The AMA has adopted numerous policies aimed at encouraging medical associations and other relevant organizations to study gender difference in income and advancement trends, by specialty, experience, work hours and other practice characteristics, and develop programs to address inequities where they exist. The AMA will continue to strongly support equity and diversity across medicine and promote professional growth and development for physicians at every stage of their careers.

The AMA Women Physicians Section (AMA-WPS) consists of more than 100,000 members of the AMA and aims to increase the number and influence of women physicians in leadership roles and to advocate for and advance the understanding of women's health issues.

Every September, the AMA 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.