

Reducing the gender gap

10 May 2018

A new study has shed light on the gender imbalance in the medical profession.

The report, by Sarah McLain, a former hospital pharmacist and final year medical student at the University of Sydney, discovered females make up 50 per cent of all medical graduates in Australia, but only 34 per cent of specialists and 12 per cent of surgeons.

The Barriers to Women's Participation in Surgery paper examined factors preventing equal participation in the surgical workforce and recent strategies to recruit and retain females in surgery.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons wants 40 per cent of doctors undertaking surgical training to be female by 2021. Currently 29 per cent of surgical trainees are women.

McLain discovered women are less likely than men to apply for surgical training and in recent years, female applicants have been less likely to be successful than their male colleagues.

The research revealed 27 per cent of Paediatric Surgeons, 16 per cent of Plastic Surgeons and 11 per cent of Vascular Surgeons are female. Only four per cent of Orthopaedic Surgeons are women.

The study also discovered a lack of women in leadership roles at medical schools.

In Australia, women make up 26 per cent of Deans and only five per cent of Heads of Surgery at medical schools. While at one medical school, only 14 per cent of surgical lectures were delivered by a female in the first two years.

McLain said the research highlights the importance of visible female role models in surgery, consistent with previous research that has found female students are more likely to choose surgery as a career if they attended a medical school with a higher proportion of women surgeons on faculty.

"You can't underestimate the importance of positive female faculty surgical role models," Miss McLain said.

"They inspire and recruit female medical students and encourage them to become surgeons.

The report also discovered in the past seven years to 2016, the number of active female Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Fellows has been slowly increasing, however males still make up 88 per cent of the cohort.

In conjunction with Dr Michelle Atkinson, Dr Upeksha (Pecky) De Silva and A/Prof Payal Mukherjee, McLain will be making a verbal presentation on Thursday 10 May at the upcoming RACS Annual Scientific Congress in Sydney from 7 – 11 May.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' 87th Annual Scientific Congress, which is being held in Sydney brings together some of the top surgical and medical minds from across New Zealand, Australia, and the rest of the world.

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For more information about the Annual Scientific Congress please visit: <https://asc.surgeons.org/>

About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

www.surgeons.org

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