

Few awards for women faculty in medicine and rehabilitation, analysis shows

July 18 2017, by Tim Sullivan

While the proportion of full-time female faculty in physical medicine and rehabilitation has risen to more than 40 percent over the last two decades, the proportion of women receiving awards and honors from a major professional association in the field has fallen, with no women receiving any awards in several recent years, and none receiving awards in some categories over the past decade, according to a new study by Harvard Medical School researchers at Spaulding Rehabilitation Network.

The findings were published the *American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*.

This is the second study in the field of physical medicine and [rehabilitation](#) to demonstrate an underrepresentation of awards presented to women physicians and the first of its kind in any medical specialty to study this disparity in academic physicians specifically.

"In this study we demonstrated that the underrepresentation of women physicians as recognition [award](#) recipients was not limited to one medical society but was a bigger problem within the specialty," said Julie Silver, lead author of this study and the earlier one and HMS associate professor of physical [medicine](#) and rehabilitation and associate chair for strategic initiatives at Spaulding Rehabilitation Network. "We hope that our research will be a wake-up call for [physician](#)- supported societies to use metrics that include, but also extend beyond, recognition awards to assess diversity and inclusion—not just for women but for all

physicians."

The study involved a review of 27 years' worth of data from the Association of Academic Physiologists. The list contained all major recognition award recipients from 1990 to 2016 with a total of 85 individual awards presented to physicians.

No woman physician has received the outstanding resident/fellow award since its inception in 2010. While the proportion of awards given to women from 1990 to 2016 has decreased from 21.7 percent to 17.9 percent, the proportion of full-time female physician faculty in [physical medicine](#) and rehabilitation has increased from 38 percent in 1992 to 41 percent in 2013.

The authors say that recognition awards from specialty societies are a useful rubric to measure the ability of women physicians to navigate key resources needed for career advancement. Among other things, medical specialty societies own or control medical journals, scientific speaking opportunities, leadership training and leadership positions on task forces, committees and boards.

A previous study by the same group of researchers published in the journal PM&R found that over a 48-year period women physicians received only 15.9 percent of the awards from the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. A key finding was that women were the most underrepresented group for prestigious lectureship awards to speak at national conferences. The study found that women received lectureships in eight of the 48 years studied.

There are many documented gender disparities for physicians in academia, including pay and promotions. This study highlights the role of medical societies as gatekeepers of crucial resources that doctors need to advance their careers and identifies a glaring gap for women

physicians.

The researchers—including five men and six [women](#) who are all affiliated with HMS—intend to publish further reports that explore the unique challenges and barriers for underrepresented physician groups. The researchers also plan on working collaboratively with physician colleagues throughout the U.S. and with national medical societies to establish and implement metrics that focus on measuring diversity and inclusion.

More information: Women Physicians Are Underrepresented in Recognition Awards From the Association of Academic Physiatrists. *American Journal of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation*. [DOI: 10.1097/PHM.0000000000000792](#)

Provided by Harvard Medical School

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