

# Administrative fellowship programs may reinforce gender disparities in healthcare leadership

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While administrative leadership programs positively impact the career paths of individual leaders, male leaders benefit more from these programs than female leaders do, according to a longitudinal study featured in the November/December issue of *Journal of Healthcare Management (JHM)*, an official publication of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

The study looked at the value of administrative fellowship programs on career attainment as well as whether career attainment differs by gender. Findings indicate that "although fellowships can accelerate career progression for both men and [women](#), the effect is significantly stronger for men, suggesting that, in aggregate, there is some risk that fellowships may be widening the leadership gender gap, rather than attenuating it," write Julie Robbins, Ph.D., The Ohio State University, along with Brooke Z. Graham, MBA, MS, James Madison University, Andrew N. Garman, PsyD, Rush University, Randa Smith Hall, MBA, MHSA, University of Alabama-Birmingham, and Jeffrey Simms, MSPHA, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in the November issue of the *Journal of Healthcare Management (JHM)*.

## Diverse leadership can lead to higher quality of care

While women account for nearly 80% of the total healthcare workforce in the United States (and 70% globally), they represent just 30% of C-

suite positions. Further, a recent survey reported 86% of women in healthcare believe change is needed to increase women in senior leadership positions. Many experts and analysts believe [women leaders](#)—and more diverse leadership in general—are critical for an efficient healthcare organization that provides high-quality care to patients from all backgrounds.

Administrative fellowship programs are highly selective and designed to help graduates move directly into healthcare leadership positions, offering practical experience as well as professional networking opportunities. Many programs focus on increasing gender diversity, yet there are few studies of the programs' impact on career progression and on gender disparities in leadership.

The research team set out to uncover whether there is a difference in career attainment between female and male graduates, between those who graduated from an administrative fellowship program and those who did not, and between female and male administrative fellows.

Demographic and career attainment data were collected in 2018 from [historical records](#), alumni databases, and career resources of the graduating classes of 2013, 2008, and 1998 from 15 administrative fellowship programs. The sample included 689 student records.

## **Closing the gender gap in healthcare leadership requires career-supporting strategies and initiatives**

Among the findings, women were found to be a slight majority of graduates across the three graduating classes. Those who began their careers in administrative fellowships increased to 38% in 2013. Further, 52% of graduates across the three classes held senior management or executive positions as of 2018. Finally, while beginning a healthcare

career in an administrative fellowship appears to accelerate career attainment for both women and men, the effect is significantly stronger for men.

While additional studies and efforts are needed, the authors believe "this research can help early careerists and especially women better understand their [career](#) planning steps and developmental opportunities to reach [leadership](#) positions." It is clear that administrative fellowship programs are a valuable vehicle for [leadership development](#).

The article goes on to suggest that administrative [fellowship](#) program directors can help reduce this gender gap by, for example, re-designing programs to be more equitable, further expanding program access to women, and tracking program application patterns by gender.

**More information:** Julie Robbins et al, Closing the Gender Gap in Healthcare Leadership: Can Administrative Fellowships Play a Role?, *Journal of Healthcare Management* (2022). [DOI: 10.1097/JHM-D-21-00314](https://doi.org/10.1097/JHM-D-21-00314)

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