

Chapter 8

Gender Equity in Medical Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Female representation in medicine is increasing, however women make up only a small percentage of senior roles in the NHS. Only 36% of consultants are female with wide variation between specialties ranging from 12% of surgeons to over half of paediatricians, gynaecologists, and directors of public health. Women comprise 77% of the NHS workforce and account for 44% of chief executives of all NHS Trusts and 47% of executive directors. This chapter analyses the role of women as leaders within the medical world and compares the representation of women in senior leadership roles within medicine and other parallel, male-dominated working environments. Alternative forms of leadership such as mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship are also considered.

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INTRODUCTION

If you reflect back on your career you can most likely think of an individual that inspired you with their vision, elevated your confidence in your abilities and had a positive impact on your work. These individuals are the great leaders with whom we cross paths and they are invaluable to organisations, uniting the individuals within them to work towards a common vision. This chapter aims to outline the importance of leadership in healthcare, and in particular the value of diversity in leadership roles and the barriers and facilitators to improved gender equity in leadership.

What is a Leader?

Most of us intuitively know what the term leadership entails; however, when faced with defining leadership in clear terms we come to realise that the concept is quite vague and has a variety of meanings to different individuals. Academic literature contains countless different definitions of leadership and an abundance of theories on the lack of consensus. Nevertheless, the common principles are best represented by these definitions:

- Leadership is the principal dynamic force that motivates and coordinates the organisation in the accomplishment of its objective (Bass, Bass and Bass, 2009).
- Leadership is the art of influencing people by persuasion or example to follow a line of action (DuBrin, 2016).
- Leadership is a psychosocial influencing dynamic (Western, 2013).

In 2006, academics at the Regent University carried out a systematic literature review which aimed to propose an integrative definition of leadership.

A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains and influences followers that have diverse gifts, abilities and skills and focuses the followers to the organisation's mission and objectives causing the followers to willingly and enthusiastically extend spiritual, emotional and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organisational mission and objectives (Winston and Patterson, 2006).

A key aspect of understanding the nature of leadership is to recognise the characteristics of a great leader. Defining key characteristics of leaders has been of great interest to leadership researchers with multiple comprehensive analyses of key traits. These definitions have faced some criticism about their simplicity from academics, but they are an accessible way to expand our understanding of leadership. The most widely used lists of character traits are the Stogdill "Traits and Skills of Leaders" from 1974 (Stogdill, 1974) and more recently the Pew Research Centres analysis of leadership traits from 2015 (see Figure 1) (Parker *et al.*, 2015).

An important concept to recognise about leadership is that although you will find many great leaders in management and high-level positions, leadership is not dependent on the possession of a position of authority or rank. Great leaders may often find themselves in management positions as a result of their leadership skills, but those skills can be applied effectively at any rank. It is important to have leaders in all levels of an organisation to create a united vision. Individuals in lower level positions that possess the characteristics of a leader and have a clear vision can be impactful leaders within an organisation.

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