

Is the Glass-Ceiling Higher Than We Think? Gender Disparity Trends in Physician Executive Positions and Academic Plastic Surgery

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Introduction:

Advanced levels of professorship as well as executive positions are considered markers of success in medical academia. Despite gender parity in medical school graduates, gender disparities within positions of power remain unequal. The purpose of this study is to analyze gender composition at different levels of leadership at multiple academic, highly ranked institutions.

Methods:

Hospital executives and academic plastic surgery faculty were identified through an Internet-based search of all Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)-accredited plastic surgery integrated and independent residency training programs. Institutions from the *U.S. News* 2018-19 Top 20 Best Hospitals Honor Roll and *Beckers Review* 2018: 100 Great Hospitals in America were also included. Information on board of directors/trustees (BOD), administrators and plastic surgery faculty with focus on title, gender, degree, specialty and academic rank were collected from departmental and hospital websites. Duplicate institutions were excluded.

Results: Data on Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)/Presidents (n=275) and BOD members (n=5,347) from 153 medical institutions were analyzed. Physicians consisted of 40.7% (n=112) of CEOs/presidents, of which 10.7% (n=12) were surgeons, and 15.6% (n=835) of the BOD membership. Female physicians in executive roles were disproportionately low consisting of 5% (n=14) of CEOs/presidents, reaching significance (**p=0.033**).

Gender representation within plastic surgery departments demonstrated similar trends. Women comprised of 18.3% of the overall plastic surgery faculty (n=1,441). Significant differences between mean male and female plastic surgeons (8.2 vs. 1.84, **p=<0.001**) were observed. In addition, female plastic surgeons represented only 26.3% of all assistant professors (**p=<0.001**), 18.75% of total associate professors (**p=<0.001**) and 7.8% of full professors (**p=<0.001**).

Conclusion: Although women are increasingly pursuing careers in medicine and surgery, the data suggest that there remains a paucity of female physicians in top leadership roles. At the departmental level, female plastic surgeons are also underrepresented. At the executive level, men make up over 88% of physician CEOs at the highest ranked medical institutions. This study further highlights the need for the development of educational, mentorship and career pathways to further improve female representation in positions of power within academia.