Digital Health Summit: Inaugural Event at Heart Rhythm 2019

Interview by Jodie Elrod

In this interview, we learn more about Heart Rhythm Society’s (HRS) first-ever Digital Health Summit taking place May 8, 2019 at the upcoming 40th Annual Heart Rhythm Scientific Sessions in San Francisco, California. EP Lab Digest speaks with Nassir F. Marrouche, MD, FHRs, Chair of the HRS’s Digital Health Working Group and Chair of the Digital Health Summit.

Why is the Heart Rhythm Society focusing on digital health? What are some of the most exciting or promising advances today in digital health technologies for electrophysiology?

Digital health technologies in relation to the management of our patients with heart rhythm disorders are advancing rapidly. Consumers and patients now have easy access to biometric data, including the ability to detect abnormal heart rhythms such as atrial fibrillation (AFib).

Women in Electrophysiology: Supporting Each Other to Achieve Success

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The rapid evolution of new technologies, drugs, and devices to treat arrhythmias has made cardiac electrophysiology a fertile field for research and development. Such progress was made possible by the brilliant male and female scientists who paved the way before us. Unfortunately, the number of physician-scientists spearheading such research and translating it into clinical medicine has declined over the years.

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A 2014 report by the NIH Physician-Scientist Workforce Working Group found that physician-scientists made up only 1.5 percent of all U.S. physicians. Furthermore, women are underrepresented amongst MD-PhD students and physician-scientists. In the field of cardiac electrophysiology, the number of women who perform procedures and conduct research are few and far between. Last year saw the highest number of women in first-year electrophysiology fellow positions, and yet it was only 19%. Therefore, it is no surprise that there are even fewer women who successfully publish papers, attain leadership roles, and obtain research funding.

A recent study of almost 35,000 scientists showed that women individually held fewer grants, submitted fewer applications, and were less successful in renewing grants. Fewer than one-third of grant applications and awards went to women, and a high attrition rate was observed among women in early stages of their career. The dwindling of an already low number of female scientists suggests there is an increased need for networking, collaborative investigations, and mentorship among women — both within and outside of one’s institution — to initiate and continue to grow their career.

Personally, I am grateful for the mentorship I have received within Columbia University through Dr. Steven O. Marx, Professor of Medicine, and Dr. Hasan Garan, Chief of the Electrophysiology Service, who have been my major supporters and mentors. I am also fortunate to have established women scientists at Columbia who have been role models for me, including: Dr. Anne Taylor, Vice Dean of Affairs, Dr. Penelope Boyden, Professor of Pharmacology, and Dr. Marianne Legato, Founder of The Foundation For Gender-Specific Medicine. At Columbia, we also have a transdisciplinary group for the Center

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Figure 1: Elaine Wan, MD, FACC, FAHA, FHRS with second-year Columbia University electrophysiology fellow, Salma Baksh, MD.

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For Women’s Cardiovascular Health for all practicing women physicians focusing on women’s health. I am very fortunate to have past and current colleagues who have always treated me as an equal and been supportive of women. Over the last 10 years, Columbia’s EP program has trained 7 women electrophysiologists who are now practicing all around the nation. Being a part of a promotional network within my institution has been just as important as having role models outside of it. The successful women I have met along the way include: Dr. Lee Eckhardt (University of Wisconsin), Dr. Kris Patton (University of Washington), Dr. Mina Chung (Cleveland Clinic), and Dr. Andrea Russo (Cooper University Hospital, and also President-Elect of HRS). They have given me advice to strengthen my career and build visibility. For all women in electrophysiology, including physicians, nurses, technicians, and assistants, there are many national and international resources to find support. Committees and conferences sponsored by the American College of Cardiology,1 American Heart Association,2 Heart Rhythm Society,3 European Society of Cardiology,4 as well as industry-sponsored conferences such as Abbott’s Women in Electrophysiology Arrhythmia Symposium, BIOTRONIK’s EPIC Alliance, and Medtronic’s Women’s Leadership Conference are all excellent platforms to meet women in science and industry. When I go to these conferences, I bring my female electrophysiology fellows along, because it is important that women support each other and pay forward the mentorship and guidance to the next generation.

My current second-year fellow, Dr. Salma Baksh, has benefited from networking during her cardiology fellowship, and credits Dr. Janet Han of the VA Greater Los Angeles Medical Center for inspiring the mentorship and guidance to the future generation of women physicians and scientists. We must work together to improve care and to ensure that women continue to be a part of developments in science and technology. The way to achieve success is together!

We write this article in hopes to initiate a wave of propagating support and mentorship forward to the future generation of women physicians and scientists. We must work together to improve care and to ensure that women continue to be a part of developments in science and technology. The way to achieve success is together!

Salma Baksh Chaudhary, MD, electrophysiologist, wife, and mother is available for an attending position next year.

References