

35 Years of Experience From the American Association for Women Radiologists: Increasing the Visibility of Women in Radiology

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Abstract

Women radiologists remain in minority, unchanged for the past several decades. In 1981, the American Association for Women Radiologists (AAWR) was founded to address the problems that women radiologists were experiencing in being subordinate to male radiologists in the workplace and at the national level in organizations with respect to political power and financial compensation, as well as additional issues unique to women in radiology. The AAWR defined goals to meet the needs of women in radiology: improve the visibility of women radiologists, advance the professional and academic standing of women in radiology, and identify and address issues faced by women in radiology. AAWR efforts have included providing opportunities for career development and award recognition, hosting educational programs at national meetings, and publishing numerous manuscripts on issues faced by women in radiology. The AAWR recognizes that although there has been significant progress in the standing of women in radiology over the past 35 years, there is much room for improvement. The AAWR will continue to advocate for the needs of women in radiology.

Key Words: Women, radiology, AAWR, diversity

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INTRODUCTION

Women radiologists remain a minority, with the latest ACR Commission on Human Resources workforce survey demonstrating that only 21% of practicing radiologists in the United States are women, a percentage that has not changed significantly in the past several decades [1,2]. In 1981, the American Association for Women Radiologists (AAWR) was founded to address the problems women radiologists were experiencing in

being subordinate to their male colleagues in the workplace and at the national level in organizations with respect to political power and financial compensation, as well as additional issues unique to women in radiology. Initial problems identified included poor visibility for women at national meetings, low acceptance rate for publications by women authors, lack of recruitment or even interviewing of women, lack of promotion in the academic or private practice, and lack of guidance for work-life balance. Although there have been many improvements in the status of women in radiology over the past 35 years, the continued paucity of women in radiology, especially in leadership positions, remains concerning.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AAWR

The AAWR first officially met during the 1981 annual meeting of the RSNA. The RSNA Board of Directors, with the support of president-elect Theodore Tristan, MD, provided the initial funding and administrative support for the founding of the AAWR [3]. At that time, the founders of the AAWR, Helen Redman, MD, and

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Ann Lewicki, MD, formed a steering committee of approximately 20 members to develop the mission, vision, and goals of the AAWR. The initial first officers included Carol Rumack, MD, Linda Fahr, MD, Katherine Shaffer, MD, and Nancy Whitley, MD [4]. This group strongly supported the importance of offering solutions for change rather than protesting discrimination and laid the groundwork for the current AAWR mission:

To provide a forum for issues unique to women in radiology, radiation oncology and related professions; sponsor programs that promote opportunities for women; and facilitate networking and career development among members and other professionals.

The AAWR defined a set of goals to meet the needs of women in radiology and to achieve its mission:

1. Improve the visibility of women radiologists.
2. Advance the professional and academic standing of women in radiology.
3. Identify and address issues faced by women in radiology.

IMPROVE THE VISIBILITY OF WOMEN RADIOLOGISTS

Since its inception, a top priority of the AAWR has been to improve the visibility of women in radiology. The initial steering committee members recognized that opportunities for visibility at national meetings improved women's opportunities for publication, recruitment, and nomination for leadership positions. Nominations for leadership positions and committee assignments are often awarded to the person seen as right for the job at the right time (man or woman). Without visibility, women were often overlooked for such positions.

At the time the AAWR was founded, women were rarely invited to speak or moderate at national meetings, even if they were the first authors of presentations. Founding members of the AAWR introduced the concept of comoderators to encourage the selection of women for moderating positions without changing the ability of men to be moderators as well. This small change greatly increased the visibility of women, providing an opportunity for appropriate recognition for their career successes. Maintaining the visibility of women at national meetings and in national societies remains an ongoing goal of the AAWR.

AAWR awards serve as another avenue to increase the visibility of women in radiology. Several awards recognize

women's achievements and provide opportunities for women to pursue career development programs. Awards include the highest recognition, the Marie Curie Award for outstanding achievement in radiology, named after Madame Curie for her pioneering efforts in radioactivity, and the Alice Ettinger Award for lifetime achievement, named after Dr Ettinger, first chair of radiology at Tufts University/New England Medical Center, who brought the gastrointestinal spot film device to the United States from Germany in the 1930s. Additionally, awards for distinguished residents and in-training awards for members presenting scientific abstracts at national meetings are offered. The AAWR also supports early- and mid-career women radiologists nominated to attend the highly competitive Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) national faculty development courses by paying the meeting registration fee. These meetings provide an opportunity for early- and midcareer women to gain national academic exposure. Since 2012, the AAWR in association with the American Society of Neuroradiology and the ACR has offered an award to provide leadership training opportunities for midcareer women in neuroradiology by sponsoring the nominee's attendance at the ACR Radiology Leadership Institute Summit. Attendance at the Radiology Leadership Institute is an outstanding opportunity for women faculty members to gain leadership skills and network with leaders in radiology. These awards help the AAWR serve as a pipeline for national leadership positions by offering an opportunity for women's successes to be highlighted at the national level.

ADVANCE THE PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC STANDING OF WOMEN IN RADIOLOGY

Educational Programs and Networking

The AAWR aims to advance the professional and academic standing of women in radiology and has designed programs to teach and improve professional skills in domains such as leadership, publication, and negotiation. These skills have been targeted to help women develop the executive presence necessary for career success. Since 1981, the AAWR has hosted a refresher course at the RSNA annual meeting. This refresher course provides speakers with the opportunity to gain national recognition and attendees the opportunity to enhance their professional skills. Topics covered have included quality of life, work-life balance, career transitions, and radiation safety issues in the workplace. The success of the AAWR annual

refresher course at the RSNA meeting has been recognized by the ACR, which now also offers an AAWR educational course at its annual meeting as of 2015 (the inaugural year for educational programming at the ACR meeting). In addition to refresher courses, the AAWR has offered networking opportunities at the RSNA, ACR, ARRS, American Society for Radiation Oncology, and Association of University Radiologists meetings, mentoring sessions at national meetings, and a teleconferenced book club. Many subspecialty societies, including the Society for Pediatric Radiology, have also hosted AAWR speakers on professional skills development.

The personalized style of communication favored in the events hosted by the AAWR offers a unique method to foster women's careers by using unparalleled mentoring access to women in leadership positions throughout the country. As such, the AAWR is able to support the needs of women at all career levels. In addition to offering support to women at the national level, the AAWR has been supportive of members at the institutional level. For example, the AAWR offered mentorship support to an early-career faculty member in the design and implementation of an institutional female faculty development program, which has the potential to be beneficial to all departments [5]. Senior members in the AAWR serve as an outstanding resource to junior members who have similar academic interests.

ACR Commission for Women and General Diversity

The formation of the ACR Commission for Women and General Diversity has been the result of the efforts of many. The need for dedicated efforts at the national level to advance programs and policies that address the needs of women and other minorities in radiology was brought to the attention of the ACR by the AAWR leadership. Paul Ellenbogen, MD, chair of the ACR Board of Chancellors at the time and a member of the AAWR, established the commission, with Katarzyna Macura, MD, past AAWR president (2005) becoming the inaugural chair of the commission in 2013. This commission has brought the needs of individual women in radiology championed by the AAWR to the national policy level. The goals of this commission are strongly supportive of the mission of the AAWR [6]:

- To increase awareness and recognition of the value created by diversity and make the radiologic professions welcoming and inclusive for women and minorities underrepresented in medicine

- To improve professional opportunities, participation, representation, and contribution of women and minorities to the radiologic professions
- To improve organizational and institutional performance by leveraging diversity

This commission has recognized that diversity and inclusion are critical to the future success of radiology and radiation oncology and has produced several publications to support these findings [7-9]. These publications explore the status of diversity in radiology and radiation oncology, identify the challenges minority groups, including women, face during their careers, and provide strategies to overcome current barriers.

IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS ISSUES FACED BY WOMEN IN RADIOLOGY

Another area of importance to the AAWR is identifying and addressing issues faced by women in radiology. This includes issues in the workplace such as maternity leave, childcare and lactation facilities, implementation of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and salary gender equity. From the beginning, AAWR members have worked together to address these issues in the form of research and publications. The organization offers networking for women to collaborate interinstitutionally with others who have similar interests and goals.

Early members of the AAWR successfully pushed for a change in the ABR's eligibility policy to allow 4 consecutive weeks of leave in 1 calendar year (without changing the total allowed 16 weeks off during residency). This policy was implemented for both men and women and created the basis for maternity leave during radiology residency. Pregnancy and maternity leave policies continue to be pursued by AAWR members, with recommendations made for national policies on pregnancy and maternity leave [10-13]. Additionally, members of the AAWR continue to raise the importance of enacting family leave policies that are in accordance with the FMLA in all departments for both residents and faculty members [14]. The AAWR aims to work with the ABR to implement parental leave policies consistent with the FMLA (12 weeks). AAWR past presidents Kimberly Applegate, MD, and Peggy Fritzsche, MD, first succeeded in securing childcare and lactation facilities at the RSNA meeting in 2001, an important precedent that can help establish both as the expected standard requirements at all major national meetings in the near future. In 2015, Elizabeth Arleo, MD (current AAWR treasurer), and colleagues published recommendations

for all radiology and radiation oncology facilities to provide lactation facilities [15]. Since then, AAWR members have championed implementation of mothers' rooms around the country [16].

Recent data on physician salary gender inequity across specialties demonstrate encouraging results for radiology. According to one study of all specialties in academic medicine, the adjusted salaries of women exceeded those of men only in radiology [17]. However, it is uncertain if the reported salaries in this study include incentive or bonus opportunities for higher ranking physicians. Additionally, there is lack of information to evaluate gender equity among salaries of private practice radiologists. This remains an area of future concern for the AAWR.

AAWR GROWTH AND RECOGNITION

The success of the AAWR can be seen in its continual growth. What began as an informal series of meetings consisting of two women has developed into a nationally recognized society with more than 800 members. The AAWR has developed partnerships with larger national societies and subspecialty societies to supplement its expansion efforts. Although the AAWR is a relatively small society, these partnerships offer the AAWR the opportunity to host refresher courses and networking events at large national meetings. Attendance at these refresher courses is not limited to AAWR members. Additionally, these partnerships allow the AAWR to continue to gain visibility on a national level. Partnership with the ACR allows cost-effectiveness by sharing staff and administration.

The value of the AAWR has been solidified not only by the individual successes of the women to whom it has offered career development tools but by national recognition of the society itself. In 2005, the AAMC recognized the importance of the AAWR and its efforts to advance women in radiology in the form of the AAMC Women in Medicine Leadership Award. This award commended the AAWR for improving the environment for women in academic medicine and for helping women radiologists to realize their potential.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN RADIOLOGY

The AAWR recognizes that its members are only a subset of women and men in radiology with particular interest in promoting the career advancement of women in radiology. Overall societal improvements in the recognition of women and the individual efforts of many women in radiology who choose not to affiliate with the AAWR have also played a significant role in the improved

standing of women in radiology. The AAWR's persistent efforts to improve the visibility of women in radiology, offer networking opportunities, and serve as an official resource for nomination ensure constant advocacy for women in radiology that supplements the efforts of individual women.

In the 35 years since the founding of the AAWR, many women, both those associated with the AAWR and those not, have attained positions of leadership as department chairs and radiology society presidents. Although difficult to prove direct impact, the influence of the AAWR can be seen on review of ACR leadership. Only 2 women, both past AAWR presidents, have served as ACR Council speaker and vice speaker. Only 3 women, 2 of them past AAWR presidents (all three AAWR members), have served as ACR president (of 93 total presidents of the ACR). The standing of women in leadership in the ACR has improved, with 10 women (3 of whom are past AAWR presidents) now serving on the ACR Board of Chancellors (33 total current members) and 6 women currently serving on the 2016 and 2017 ACR Council Steering Committee (22 total current members). As of May 2016, Geraldine McGinty, MD, MBA, serves as the first woman vice chair of the ACR Board of Chancellors and will subsequently serve as the first woman chair of the ACR Board of Chancellors. The AAWR applauds the ACR for this major advance in diversity of ACR leadership. Increasing diversity in radiology leadership enhances the future of radiology and, as said by the Commission for Women and General Diversity, "by leveraging diverse backgrounds, experiences, and skills of those in (radiology and radiation oncology), we will create new, effective ways to not only educate our trainees, medical colleagues, and patients but also improve delivery of health care and our service to society" [8].

Since its inception, the AAWR has been instrumental in the nomination of women for national Gold Medal awards. Before 1981 and the foundation of the AAWR, only two women, Marie Curie and Edith Quimby, had been awarded the ACR Gold Medal. To date, 6 more (8 of 204 total [3.9%]) ACR Gold Medals have been awarded to women: Alice Ettinger, Rosalyn Yalow, Kay Vydareny, Sarah Donaldson, Valerie Jackson, and Carol Rumack (2 are past AAWR presidents). Of the 8 women awarded the ACR Gold Medal, 2 are Nobel Prize winners: Marie Curie (physics in 1903 and chemistry in 1911) and Rosalyn Yalow (physiology or medicine in 1977). This indicates the height of the bar set for women to be awarded an ACR Gold Medal, as only 48 women total have been awarded the Nobel Prize.

TAKE-HOME POINTS

- The AAWR has been instrumental in providing a forum for interested women in radiology to improve their professional and academic standing.
- To promote matters of individual importance for women in radiology at the national policy level, the AAWR has contributed to the formation of the ACR Commission for Women and General Diversity.
- The AAWR recognizes that although there has been significant progress in the standing of women in radiology over the past 35 years, there is much room for improvement.
- The AAWR will continue to advocate for the needs of women in radiology through efforts with the ABR to implement maternity leave policies consistent with the FMLA and efforts to ensure lactation and childcare facilities are consistently provided at all national radiology society meetings.
- Future AAWR efforts will focus on recruiting more women into radiology and providing a voice for the nomination of women for leadership positions at the national level to further increase the visibility of women in radiology.

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