

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

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