

Meeting report: Women's Dermatology Society Forum at the 25th World Congress of Dermatology, Singapore, 2023

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Introduction

The Women's Dermatology Society (WDS) organized a forum at the World Congress of Dermatology in Singapore in July 2023, focusing on themes of international female leadership in dermatology, gender equity, and resilience. This forum was especially significant as it was dedicated to Professor Gabriella Fabbrocini (Fig. 1), a dear friend and highly respected colleague, who passed away on March 3, 2023. She was Professor and Chair of Dermatology at University Federico II, Naples, and made huge contributions to the field of dermatology.

The forum was organized by the WDS International Chair, Dr. Roni P. Dodiuk-Gad, and by the committee members: Dr. Dedee F. Murrell, Dr. Mona Gohara, Dr. Rashmi Sarkar, Dr. Nancy Todes-Taylor, and Elsa Taicher. Participants

attended from across the world and from all stages of training (Fig. 2). Many men also attended the forum, among them were Dr. George Hruza, past President of the American Academy of Dermatology, Dr. Carle Paul, past President of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology, Dr. Baruch Kaplan, President of the Israel Society of Dermatology and Venereology, Dr. Seemal Desai, American Academy of Dermatology President Elect, Dr. Manubu Fujimoto, and Dr. Trilokraj Tejasvi.

This forum addressed the multitude of challenges faced by women from different countries, backgrounds, and cultures in reaching positions of leadership in dermatology, particularly those from ethnic minorities. Throughout the event, insightful strategies were shared with attendees to make them feel empowered, inspired, and belonging to a network of powerful women;

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What is known about this subject in regard to women and their families?

- Women in dermatology, particularly those from ethnic minorities, face challenges in reaching positions of leadership.
- Gender disparities persist in academic dermatology, including slower career progression and significant pay gaps.

What is new from this article as messages for women and their families?

- This article highlights the importance of advocating for women's rights and gender equity, not only in dermatology but also in broader society.
- The article introduces the concept of leadership in dermatology as empowerment rather than just a position of power.
- It highlights the importance of building a supportive network and sharing strategies to empower women in dermatology to pursue leadership roles.
- The article calls for further research, mentorship programs, and policy changes to promote gender equity in dermatology, which could serve as a model for addressing gender disparities in other fields. Women can draw inspiration from the experiences of pioneers in the field, encouraging them to pursue leadership roles.



Fig. 1. Professor Gabriella Fabbrocini (1964–2023). The Women's Dermatology Society International Leadership Forum was dedicated to the memory of Gabriella Fabbrocini, Chair of Dermatology at the University Federico II in Naples, Italy.

to commit to a purpose bigger than oneself; and to have actionable insights into being a female leader.

We present highlights from international dermatology pioneers and their suggestions to aspiring leaders.

Struggles, perseverance, and collaboration

The forum commenced with a welcome from Dr. Roni P. Dodiuk-Gad, Clinical Associate Professor and Head of Dermatology at Bruce Rappaport Faculty of Medicine, who emphasized the importance of safeguarding women's rights in light of the persisting gender gap worldwide. According to the World Economic Forum, most countries have slowed progress towards closing their gender gap.¹ Last year, the overall gender parity score was 68.1%. At this rate of progress, it will take 132 years to achieve gender equity.¹

The ladder, leader, and legacy: keys to leadership

Dr. Mona Gohara, Associate Clinical Professor at Yale School of Medicine, delivered the WDS Presidential keynote speech on redefining leadership as empowerment rather than just a position of power. She outlined 3 pivotal aspects of leadership: the Ladder, symbolizing the journey toward success; the Leader, representing the influential role they hold; and the Legacy, emphasizing the enduring impact left behind. Despite female dermatologists being first authors of a growing number of publications, up from 12% in 1976 to 48% in 2006,² their advancement to senior academic positions is slower,² with women constituting only 18% of editor-in-chief positions.³ Female dermatologists earn 28% less than their male counterparts.⁴

Fostering gender equity in academic dermatology

Dr. Dedee F. Murrell, Chair of the Dermatology Department at St George Hospital, New South Wales, Australia, delivered the



Fig. 2. Participants of the WDS International Leadership Forum during the 25th World Congress of Dermatology.

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WDS Leadership keynote speech, providing further evidence for the persisting disparities in senior academic dermatology. Although women constitute the majority of dermatology trainees in the US, almost half of dermatologists, and 56% of dermatology academics, their representation in leadership roles remains limited. They represent less than 25% of dermatology chairs and only 17% of full-time academic career women are full professors.

International leadership among women in dermatology

The forum featured the unique experiences of international dermatology female leaders. Dr. Sidra Khan, Global Health Lead for the British Association of Dermatologists, encouraged attendees to practice kind and compassionate leadership. This is exemplified by the former New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, recognized for having practiced her role with empathy and compassion.⁵ This model of leadership, summarized with the acronym "NEAR," is defined by the ability to notice suffering, empathize, appraise contributing causes, and respond to alleviate the hardship.^{5,6}

Dr. Elena Pope reminded attendees to maintain time for oneself. Dr. Ncoza Dlova, Head of Dermatology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, addressed the challenges she overcame to be the first African woman to become a Professor of Dermatology and Medical School Dean.

Dr. Valerie Callender, founder of the Callender Dermatology and Cosmetic Centre and Professor of Dermatology at Howard University, drew analogy to former First Lady Michelle Obama and Vice President Kamala Harris. Through their work, success, and integrity, they inspire and empower other women from ethnic minorities to succeed.

Dr. Rashmi Sarkar, Director Professor of Dermatology at Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, was the recipient of the 2023 WDS International Pioneer Award. She shared her journey of learning from fellow WDS members and acknowledged their influence in her career development, recognizing progress builds upon the collective efforts of all.

Dr. Yen Loo Lim, Dermatology Associate Program Director at the National Healthcare Group, and Dr. Suat Hoon Tan, Director of the National Skin Centre, detailed the positive culture of female leadership in Singapore. The WCD host country has a strong female representation in health care where women constitute 46% of dermatologists, 40% of heads of dermatology departments, and 40% of the senior management at the National Healthcare Group. Dr. Akemi Ishida-Yamamoto, Chair of Asahikawa Medical University in Japan, reminded us of the work remaining in her country, which ranked 116th in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report.

Dr. Delphine Kerob, International Scientific Director at La Roche-Posay and Consultant Dermatologist at St. Louis Hospital, shared studies demonstrating a positive correlation between the presence of women on company boards and corporate social responsibility scores.⁷

Questions-and-answers with renowned leaders

The forum featured an engaging questions-and-answers session with leaders in the field. Dr. Amy McMichael, the first African American woman Chair of a Dermatology Department and Professor at Wake Forest School of Medicine, shared her perspective on viewing setbacks as stepping stones to success. Dr. Pearl Grimes, Founder and Director of the Vitiligo and Pigmentation Institute of Southern California, narrated her inspiring journey including starting the WDS Women's Shelter Initiative. This program, launched in 2018, uplifts women in need and addresses their skin care and social needs.⁸ Dr. Perla

Lansang, Associate Professor of Dermatology at the University of Toronto, highlighted the impact of her mentors on her career trajectory. Dr. Nawar El-Falasi, Founder of The Skin Institute Medical Center in Abu Dhabi, is expanding her institution to other cities and investing in novel technologies. Dr. Ines Verner, Medical Director of the Verner Clinic in Tel Aviv, spoke about the challenges of being the founder and CEO of start-ups in the field of medical devices. Dr. Marina Landau, an accomplished dermatologist also working in Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, outlined the importance of incorporating academic research in her practice.

Conclusions and future directions

The WDS Forum provided a platform to address leadership, gender equity, and resilience in global dermatology. Attendees learned from each other's experiences, setbacks, and successes.

The forum identified several areas for future study and action. These include conducting research on factors affecting gender disparities in academic dermatology, developing mentorship programs to nurture female dermatologists, and advocating for policy changes to promote gender equity. Moreover, the forum recognized the need for specialized leadership training tailored to women.

In conclusion, this forum reaffirmed the pivotal role of women's leadership, resilience, and solidarity in dermatology. By creating a supportive network and addressing existing challenges, the forum empowered attendees to embrace leadership roles, inspire others, and work toward achieving gender equity in dermatology.

We invite you to become a member of the WDS and keep up-to-date with our upcoming events: <https://www.womensderm.org/membership>, and to connect by joining a Whatsapp group created especially for this forum via the QR code below:



Conflicts of interest

None.

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