

WHY SPONSOR THE G.E.M. FORCE-GENDER EQUITY IN MEDICINE

HADASSAH



Hadassah's Domestic Advocacy Gender-Balanced Medical Research

Why is Gender Equity in Medical Research Important?

A multitude of diseases are often misdiagnosed, or overlooked entirely, in women because medical research, diagnostic tools, and treatments are frequently based on male physiology. Even animal and cellular research subjects are overwhelmingly more male than female.

Symptoms for many diseases do not present the same way in men and women, and too many research institutions still ignore the role of gender in medical outcomes. **Heart disease is the number one killer of women, yet only 1/3 of research subjects are female**¹. Without adequate participation in research trials, women are also vulnerable to dangerous drug reactions that could have been avoided. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), women and men respond differently to many drugs, including antihistamines, blood pressure medicine, anesthesia, aspirin, sleep aids and more.

While the last two decades have seen tremendous progress toward gender equity, particularly in late-stage clinical trials, foundational, early-stage medical studies still tend to use more male animals than female ones, or fail to take sex differences into consideration at all in research. While the Institute of Medicine has said that “every cell has a sex,” most studies ignore this factor altogether.² This can have negative consequences for women’s health. Researchers at Brigham and Women’s Hospital recently said, “Medical research that is gender-neutral or skewed to male physiology puts women at risk for missed opportunities for prevention, incorrect diagnoses, misinformed treatments, sickness and even death.”³

And the practical effects are clear – recently it was discovered that women have been prescribed a recommended dose of one popular sleep aid that was twice the amount needed. The National Institutes of Health is taking positive steps to correct this, and Congress has become involved, pushing for better policies that will lead to better health outcomes for women.

HADASSAH'S WORK

Hadassah is the founder of the Gender Equity in Medicine (GEM) Initiative, a new and growing group of organizations working to ensure that medical research benefits everyone. Hadassah has a tradition of policy and advocacy work in women's health, leading targeted and effective campaigns. Today, Every Beat Counts: Hadassah's Heart Health Program™ educates women about risks, prevention, and detection of heart disease, the number one cause of death among women in the U.S. We also implement Check It Out®, a breast cancer awareness program for teens and adults of both genders. The campaign is focused on disease prevention and screening for the purpose of early detection and treatment. Hadassah Medical Organization's medical expertise has led the way on women's health research for decades, including the areas of gender-balanced medical research and access to basic, preventive care.

PREVENTIVE CARE

All women need at least one well-woman visit a year, while some will need two or three.⁴ Yet research demonstrates that in the U.S. rates of usage for preventive measures – from regular screenings for diabetes and mammograms to more frequent pap smears and testing for STDs – are poor.⁵ Women now have access to a multitude of preventive services – from cancer and chronic condition screenings to vaccinations, sexual health and pregnancy services, and healthy behaviors counseling. Yet four in ten women are unaware of services covered by the new health care laws.⁶

Furthermore, though a majority of women receive checkups, the opportunity for preventive counseling is often missed. Care providers are often at a loss as to what to include in preventive health care visits and services are often fragmented between family Medicine practices, OB-GYNs, pediatricians, and others. This requires women to be educated consumers on behalf of themselves and their families.⁵

POLICY ACTION

Until 1994, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (one of the world's largest funders of biomedical research) excluded women from early studies of most drugs. Though mainly for safety reasons, this prohibition meant there was little information about the effects of diagnoses, as well as drugs and other therapies, on women. The National Institutes of Health is taking positive steps to correct this, and Congress has become involved, pushing for better policies that will lead to better health outcomes for women.

On April 29, 2016 Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN) and Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) reintroduced the bipartisan Research for All Act ([H.R.2101](#)) so that medical research can benefit women and men equally. This critical legislation would help ensure that U.S.-funded biomedical research—from the most basic, cellular-level studies to late-stage clinical trials—accounts for differences between the sexes and yields therapies and cures that are tailored appropriately for both men and for women. [Hadassah is proud endorser of the Research for All Act](#), which represents a critical step toward ensuring effective, non-discriminatory medical research.

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- 1
Published by Centers for Disease Control at <http://1.usa.gov/1iAuCUt>.
- 2
Published by Institute of Medicine at <http://bit.ly/1merF7Z>.
- 3
Published by Brigham and Women's Hospital at <http://bit.ly/1cxJZFR>.
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