

A century of women, including this “doctor mom”

In response to Dr Lawrence C. Loh’s article titled “Women in medicine—strength in leadership,”¹ the Federation of Medical Women of Canada (FMWC) agrees that women should not be the only ones to sacrifice their time and energy for the sake of their children. I may not be a “girl dad,” but I am a proud “doctor mom” to 3 lovely girls, one of whom is just a few weeks old. I have had to navigate certification examinations, fellowship interviews, and the uncertainty of disclosing a pregnancy in case it will affect my career, all while feeling guilty that I am missing out on some key moments in their lives. Pumping breast milk in postoperative surgical bathrooms at 3:00 AM on call was not what I imagined when I started my career in medicine, but it is just part of being a doctor mom.

The challenges of being a woman in medicine are not new. The FMWC has advocated for the advancement of women in medicine for nearly a century and has worked to connect women physicians and trainees from across Canada to ensure support and mentorship. We advocate for women’s health issues both within Canada and abroad. The FMWC is constantly revisiting strategies to achieve our mission of being a national organization committed to the professional, social, and personal advancement of women physicians and to the promotion of the well-being of women both in the medical profession and in society at large.

As a new-in-practice physician, mother, and psychiatrist I have witnessed first-hand the difficulties faced by women physicians over the past few years during the pandemic, as they have had to balance even more in an ever challenging and complex health care landscape. This makes the networking, advocacy, and connections that the FMWC provides to our members even more important as we move into our next century of work. Levels of burnout have been unprecedented; burnout is seen more often in primary care physicians, who are predominantly women.² However, neither family physicians nor any other specialist physicians are immune to the extra responsibilities that fall more on women than on men.

Our founding members’ goal was to ensure equal representation for women in medicine; currently, with nearly 56% of medical trainees identifying as female,³ this goal is close to being achieved. Despite this, women in medicine continue to face many challenges, including a lack of opportunities for leadership positions, balancing their home lives and careers, and an ongoing pay gap between men and women in our profession. More work needs to be done.

I know that the FMWC will continue the legacy of our founding members, including that of Dr Elizabeth Bagshaw, who was the medical director of Canada’s first birth control clinic and who supported women to deliver their babies even by kerosene lamps from her car.

One of my mentors, Dr Larry Svenson, who recently passed away, once said to me “Live your life as if you were someone’s only role model.” I think this goes for our organization. We strive to be role models for each other, for women’s health, and for the health of those who identify as such.

We hope you will join us for our 100th anniversary celebration in Ottawa, Ont, from September 26 to 28, 2024, at the Fairmont Château Laurier—a gathering where doctor moms, women physicians, and friends can meet to plan the important work that needs to be done in the next century.

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Acknowledgment

Dr Kimberly Williams is President of the Federation of Medical Women of Canada.

Competing interests

None declared

References

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Can Fam Physician 2024;70:9. DOI: 10.46747/cfp.70019

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