

Editorial

Empowering women ophthalmologists for advancing research and scientific writing

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Globally, women represent an increasing proportion of the ophthalmology workforce. Women ophthalmologists are also slowly but increasingly stepping into leadership roles as clinicians, surgeons, educators, and innovators. Despite these contributions, women in ophthalmology remain underrepresented and face notable challenges in areas such as research and scientific writing.

Scientific writing is more than a medium of communication; it is a tool for establishing expertise, influencing practice and shaping the future of healthcare and medical education. A recent analysis showed that women published fewer articles as first and senior authors than men.^[1] This underrepresentation is rooted in many structural and cultural barriers. Women often face challenges such as limited mentorship and fewer opportunities for collaboration and networking. The dual demands of practice and caregiving responsibilities often limit their time for scholarly activities. In addition, an unconscious bias and the ‘imposter syndrome’ are more prevalent among women, further dampening their confidence to submit manuscripts or apply for competitive research grants.^[2]

By encouraging more women ophthalmologists to engage in scientific writing, our field can benefit from diverse insights and perspectives. Focussed initiatives are essential to foster greater participation of women in research and writing:

1. **Mentorship programmes:** Establishing structured mentorship programmes can help women navigate the challenges of academic research. Mentorship by senior women ophthalmologists who have successfully contributed to science and literature can be particularly impactful.
2. **Targeted skill development workshops:** Hosting workshops focussed on research methodology, grant writing and manuscript preparation for women ophthalmologists can help to build their confidence and competence.

3. **Supportive work structure:** Developing a work environment that supports work-life balance and provides opportunities for research and academic scholarship activities can yield fruitful results. Facilitating peer support groups and networking events can create a community where women ophthalmologists provide mutual encouragement.
4. **Collaborative opportunities:** Encouraging multi-institutional and interdisciplinary collaborations can help women researchers gain visibility and access to resources that may otherwise be limited.
5. **Inspiration through role models:** Highlighting success stories of women who have excelled in ophthalmic research and scientific authorship can serve as powerful inspirations and motivate younger women ophthalmologists to pursue these paths.
6. **Recognition and Representation:** Celebrating the contributions of women ophthalmologists in research and writing through awards and recognitions can further motivate their participation in such scientific activities. Journals and academic societies must ensure equitable representation of women in editorial boards and peer review panels.^[3,4]

Empowering women ophthalmologists to contribute more actively to research and scientific writing is not just a feminist imperative; it is a professional necessity. Diverse voices in science can ensure that the knowledge generated is comprehensive and inclusive. This call to action is not just for women but is for all ophthalmologists and stakeholders who are committed to advancing the profession for the greater good of patient care and scientific advancement. This “Women Ophthalmologists” issue of the Global Journal of Cataract Surgery and Research in Ophthalmology, wherein all authors and co-authors of submitted articles identify themselves as women, is a small step in this direction.

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