Closing the Gap: Strategies to Increase Representation of Women in Physics Leadership Positions

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Aims: The purpose of this work was to identify strategies from the business world on increasing the representation of women in leadership positions and suggest how they could be implemented in medical physics.

Materials & Methods: Literature on the status of medical physics leadership in the USA was reviewed to identify areas where there may be a gap in representation of women.[1] Then literature from the business world, such as the McKinsey 2024 report on "Women in the Workplace,"[2] was reviewed for strategies to increase the representation of women in leadership at every level. These strategies were explored for application in medical physics, with consideration for academic, clinical, therapy, and diagnostic specialization.

Results: There is evidence of a lack of gender parity in medical physics leadership positions in the USA across multiple areas. Strategies from the business world to increase representation of women in leadership positions which can be applied to medical physics include giving women opportunities for leadership experience early in their careers, setting clear expectations for promotion and success, providing mentorship to and encouraging sponsorship of early-career physicists, and tracking service work as part of promotion metrics.

Discussion: As outlined in the 2024 McKinsey report, women remain underrepresented in business leadership in the USA, and at the current rate of progress, it is predicted to take nearly 50 years to achieve gender parity for all women.[2] Unfortunately, companies' commitments to equity efforts are declining as it becomes clear that cultural change, which requires reshaping mindsets and behaviours, is required to accelerate progress. Science, and medical physics, can learn from the work being done to improve gender equity in other fields, such as the business world, and use these lessons to accelerate change in scientific areas.

References:
[1]Covington EL, Moran JM, Paradis KC. *The state of gender diversity in medical physics*. Med Phys. 2020 Apr;47(4):2038-2043. doi:10.1002/mp.14035.
[2]McKinsey & Company (2024). *Women in the Workplace*. [Company report] https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace#/