

Gender diversity: We're behind the eight ball

When I first assumed the role of president of this great association, one of the areas that I wanted to concentrate my efforts on was ensuring that the BCMA Board and the many committees that undertake such valuable work better reflect the number of women now in our profession. I realize this will be a challenge, particularly for our female colleagues who may be juggling the responsibilities of a practice along with raising their families, but it is something that must be addressed.

One of the most discussed topics in Europe last year was the relative lack of female representation on European business management boards. In fact, the European Union (EU) told member countries that they needed to improve the inequity or the EU would be forced to take matters into its own hands. European boards currently have about 10% female representation. Given that the balance of men and women in the global population is virtually equal, it could be argued that the target of 30% women that the EU is requesting by 2015 is rather unambitious. However, it would be a considerable improvement.

Women are slightly better represented on the boards of US companies at just over 16% for Fortune 500 companies. Interestingly, the higher up the Fortune ranking of the company, the higher the percentage of women on the boards. The 2010 McKinsey & Company report on gender diversity in the corporate world confirmed that there exists a correlation between increased company performance and the number of women serving on its governing body.

In Canada, the Canadian Board Diversity Council concluded in its 2010 annual report that although 62% of corporate directors believed their

boards were diverse, women held just 15% of board positions. Last year Senator Celine Hervieux-Payette introduced private member's Bill S-203, which has completed its second reading in the Senate, and as of December 2011 has been referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade, and Commerce. This bill would modernize the composition of boards of directors of certain corporations, financial institutions, and parent Crown corporations, in particular to ensure the balanced representation of women and men on those boards.

Closer to home, the current composition of British Columbia doctors is 30% female and 70% male. However, the ratio of women to men increases each year: in 2009, 57% of UBC's medical graduates were women and nationwide they numbered 58%. If we consider the BCMA's Board of Directors, it comprises 39 voting members, five of whom are women—that's just under 13%. When looking at the Board composition over the last 10 years, it has ranged from a low of five female members to a high of 11—however, in that year one female physician held two separate board positions. And female membership on many of our committees that deal with policy, health promotion, negotiations, and governance is only slightly higher, with a small pool of female physicians sitting on multiple committees. We have some work to do.

I am aware of the "double burden" syndrome: the combination of physician practice and domestic responsibilities, which can be difficult to reconcile with the "anytime anywhere" performance model. As well, it is often said that women can be reticent to advocate for themselves.

In light of the data rolling in and the acknowledgment by both male and


female leaders of the importance and value of gender diversity, it's surprising that the implementation of specific measures to increase gender diversity in organizations remains limited—ours included. Real gender equity requires real change. I am in the process of putting together a task force that will look into strategic ways of recruiting female physicians to participate in BCMA work so we can all benefit from their perspective. The goal is to create a state of affairs that benefits everyone involved. I'm hoping I can count on your support in our collective effort to keep this association relevant, influential, and strong.

—**Nasir Jetha, MD**
BCMA President

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