

Editorial

Twenty Percent

National women's physician day is observed on February 3rd in the United States of America. Social media were flooded with words of encouragement with a hashtag of #womenphysician. It is a day for all women physicians to feel special as it marks the birthday of the first women physician who received her degree in 1849. One hundred and seventy-two years have passed, and women have secured a good position in medicine.

I am a woman surgeon. There is no special day for celebration. How should I feel on February 3rd?

Despite 'triple barrier'¹ and deterrents² such as the perception of surgery as an "old boys' club", the number of women choosing surgical fields has steadily increased in the past decade. Women in surgery are highly motivated and competent; and at the same time, the support and opportunities for women in surgery have improved.³ But even normal physiological events negatively impact the education and performance of women surgeons.⁴ Women surgeons are also exposed to occupational hazards⁵ in the operating room which includes exposure to anesthetic gases, blood-borne pathogens, prolonged strenuous activities, and radiation; and there aren't adequate attempts to identify and avoid them. Several factors negatively contribute to the growth of women in the field of surgery.⁶ Maybe for some of these reasons, only 20% of Oral and Maxillofacial surgeons in Nepal are women,⁷ and I am one of them. It takes a lot of courage, guidance, and support for a woman surgeon to remain a surgeon; and, on February 3rd, I felt I did find them in my path to become a surgeon.

I am also among the few women editors in medical journals of Nepal. There are 210 journals listed on NepJol out of which 50 could be identified as journals related to the field of medicine with 758 editors. Only 20% of the editors are women. Three-fifth of the journal has less than 20% women on the editorial board (fig. 1).

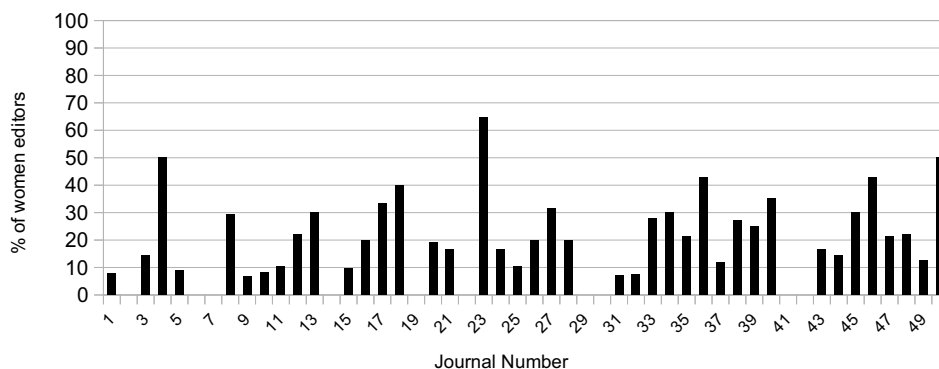


Figure 1: Percentage of Women in Editorial Team of Medical Journals of Nepal

Women in academics are disadvantaged by a vicious cycle that consists of poor representation, poor participation as peer reviewers and authors, fewer publications, less funding and awards, and less advancement and promotion.⁸ Even in the field of science and research, there are times when Joanne Rowling has to be J.K. Rowling for her to be accepted. Major journals have realized and increased the representation of women in their editorial boards.⁹ Nature – which is one of the leading publications – admitted gender bias existed in their journal.¹⁰ Another leading publication – The Lancet – announced

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their commitment to improving the participation of women in their journals under the #LancetWomen project in December 2017.⁸ Unfortunately, both of these journals were founded in the 1800s, and only in this millennium, the gender gap was realized.

For now, I am fortunate to be in 20% of the women in surgery and 20% of the women in editorial teams who got opportunities, guidance, and support; and I should be thankful. The medical journals of Nepal should be aware of the gender disparity and take initiatives to narrow the gap now.

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