



# Closing the gender gap in gynecological oncology publications: will men manage to keep up?

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We should applaud the excellent work of six women and researchers from the University of Ontario, Canada who wished to investigate the gender representation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on authorship and editorial boards of the two major peer-reviewed gynecologic oncology journals: *Gynecological Oncology* and *International Journal of Gynecological Cancer* (IJGC).<sup>1</sup> Conducting a bibliometric analysis of all original articles published in these two journals during 2016–2020, and comparing it to single years in the two prior decades (1996, 2006), the authors concluded that, despite greater representation of women over time as authors, the gender disparity in senior authorship and editorial board representation remains a major challenge and they plead for deliberate strategies to achieve gender parity.

Even though this message needs to be heard loud and clear across and beyond the gynecological oncology community, it would be an omission not to acknowledge the impressive power and potential of women that shines through the numbers presented in this article: women have steadily and continuously climbed up the ladder of scientific publications from only 9% to 57% first authorship rates in only two decades. Equally, they have increased their contribution as senior authors and as editors by more than five-fold in the same period. These highly significant trends were reflected in both the journals, indicating a universal representation and female effort across all continents. Women and their role in the field of gynecological oncology publications seem to have evolved dramatically over recent times and they appear unconquerable, reaching in some areas even higher numbers than men. Evolution and progression of effort, as reflected in the multiplication of female contributions across multiple levels, is here more impactful than absolute numbers, and this is where we as the gynecological oncology community need to focus and to respectfully acknowledge.

A sign of the unstoppable power of women is also the fact that COVID-19 failed to exacerbate or widen gender inequalities in scientific production,

even though the pandemic has disproportionately affected women more than men and has impeded their experiences at home, their health, their work as well as their economic well-being. According to figures released by the UK Office for National Statistics, women were significantly more likely than men to supervise home schooling for their children during lockdown, with almost 70% of them taking charge of their children's education compared with only 50% of their male partners.<sup>2</sup> Despite these increased responsibilities in the upbringing of their children, and having to stay at home again like their mothers and grandmothers did, women still managed to continue to publish their scientific material during this time at the same pace as before. Highly disadvantageous conditions such as those endured during lockdown failed to make women slow down, while they managed to keep up their momentum, attesting once more that they have taken the power in their hands and intend to keep it.

National and international professional associations encourage and plead nowadays for a more diverse and inclusive environment in an effort to achieve true equity and equality in medicine.<sup>3</sup> To overcome the attrition women encounter as they progress through undergraduate and postgraduate medical training, robust support mechanisms are warranted such as mentoring, adequate provisions during maternity and childcare, and dedicated time for research under a broader facilitation aspect of an optimal work–life balance. We all together need to work as a community to eliminate gender gaps and allow women to explore and invest their inherited power and prove their potential.

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## Editorial

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- 3 Bellini MI, Adair A, Fotopoulou C, *et al*. Changing the norm towards gender equity in surgery: the women in surgery working group of the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland's perspective. *J R Soc Med* 2019;112:325–9.