



Introduction

It is more than two years since WinS launched and we have made great strides towards achieving our mission and aims. This year, we have made good progress in our aim to understand issues facing women in surgery. We have been involved with a number of research projects considering this, and the role of women in medicine in general.

As Chair of WinS, Helen Fernandes was invited to join the Chief Medical Officer's working party on women in medicine and contributed to the group's final report *Women Doctors: Making a Difference*¹. This report acknowledged the particular issues surrounding surgery and made a number of constructive recommendations that we hope will be accepted by policy makers.

The Royal College of Physicians' research *Women and Medicine: The Future*² has supported previous work completed by members of the WinS committee³ in demonstrating that women are not discriminated against at the point of recruitment into surgery; women applying for SpR posts are more likely to be appointed than their male counterparts. Following on from this report, we met with the President of the College, Mr John Black, who expressed strong and positive support for WinS and for raising the profile of women surgeons.

Furthermore, the paper by Ms de Souza and Ms Cumming, WinS committee members, investigated the proportion of women involved in College politics.⁴ Their paper highlighted that, as surgeons, we need to increase our representation in order to catch up with our colleagues in non-surgical specialties.

The WinS national network is expanding with more members joining every month, ranging from medical students to consultants. Membership has risen by 14% since this time last year. The committee, which directs and supports WinS's work, has also grown this year with the appointment of Elspeth Hill and Helen Pandya as student and foundation trainee representatives. We will continue to work on new projects to ensure we can better support aspiring and practicing women surgeons.

Our mission:

To encourage, enable and inspire women to fulfil their surgical ambitions.

Our aims:

- » To raise the profile of women in surgery.
- » To work towards an understanding of the issues facing women in surgery.
- » To encourage attitudinal change ensuring women are seen as an integral part of the profession.
- » To provide advice, guidance and pastoral support for those women already in surgery or considering entering it.

1. Deech R. *Women Doctors: Making a Difference*. London: DH, October 2009

2. Elston MA. *Women and medicine: the future*. London: Royal College of Physicians, 2009.

3. McNally SA. Competition ratios for difference specialties and the effect of gender and immigration status. *J R Soc Med* 2008; **101**: 489-492

4. Cumming T, de Souza B. *Women leaders: representation on royal college councils*. WinS Newsletter, Summer 2009. <http://surgicalcareers.rcseng.ac.uk/wins/news>

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Looking back

In our 2008 annual report, we set out our plans for 2009.

We planned to continue our work to understand the reasons behind women's career choices, and how these can be affected.

- » In addition to the research mentioned above, we have continued our research with the University of Exeter. We expect this to provide information and strategies on how we can ensure women are not discouraged from pursuing surgical careers.

The provision of positive role models was set as one of our main goals for 2009:

- » We have hosted or supported events across the country that enable women surgeons to meet each other and hear about their senior colleagues' experiences in the profession. This included our annual conference, which attracted over 150 delegates.
- » We have provided speakers for medical student events across the country who have inspired students to enter surgery, and have provided practical solutions to their concerns.
- » We have facilitated personal contact between members of the WinS network seeking support regarding specific issues affecting them.
- » Our new Facebook page has been established to provide a place where WinS members can communicate directly with each other via the discussion boards.

We aimed to increase women surgeons of all grades' participation in professional activities.

- » We received record numbers of applications for membership of the WinS committee in summer. Over fifty applications were received, six of whom were shortlisted and interviewed before our two new members were appointed.
- » We encouraged female surgeons and WinS members to stand in the College Council elections. Ms Claire Marx was elected in the summer.
- » We have contacted all women in the SAS grades and invited them to join the WinS network, with the result that membership has risen.

In addition to these achievements, we have contributed to the College's new careers webpages (www.rcseng.ac.uk/career) with an entirely new WinS section. This contains new guidance on a variety of issues affecting women surgeons and background information about Women in Surgery. The site also features 'career stories' of women in all grades within surgery, which are both inspirational and informative.

Finally, we have started our project aiming to encourage students to consider applying to medical school and become surgeons. We completed a first pilot of this in Bangor, North Wales, and hope to continue this work in 2010. We aim to launch the scheme fully towards the end of 2010.

Looking forward

Over the next twelve months, we aim to:

- » Inspire school students from a range of backgrounds to consider careers in surgery
- » Encourage more women to become involved in professional activities, including work at the College. We would particularly like to encourage more women from the SAS grades to do this.
- » Consider options for providing improved pastoral support to women in surgery.
- » Increase membership of the WinS network.
- » Increase the profile of WinS in medical schools.