



The Women's Dermatology Society: Physicians, Leaders, Mentors

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Editorial

The Women's Dermatology Society: Physicians, Leaders, Mentors

The Women's Dermatology Society (WDS) has evolved to be the third largest dermatology society in the United States and is now celebrating its 45th anniversary. It has a long legacy of leadership, mentorship, networking, and volunteerism. Initially, its mission was to develop collegiality and friendship among women dermatologists, with a major action plan to enhance their involvement and representation in the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). This effort successfully put an increased number of women dermatologists on the annual meeting program, on committees, and in positions of leadership, as well as helped train and elect the first women AAD President in 1992.

Ten years ago, WDS reached a membership of 1,000, at which time it reevaluated its mission and believed that it was large enough to begin volunteer public service programs for women, children, and families. Membership and industry support has made these programs highly successful. They have capitalized on their energy and talents to empower women in the home, workplace, and profession by assisting and imparting valuable information for health care, professionalism and decision making in all areas of women's lives. The WDS has made a difference in their members' careers and life challenges, but also has expanded public health opportunities.

The successful WDS mentorship program, which was original and effective, has served as a model for all of dermatology and is being retooled and expanded. This program has influenced the education of dermatology residents and young dermatologists, as well as those dermatologists who wish to expand their expertise. This program has involved both men and women as mentors and/or mentees.

Of interest, in the original by-laws, the WDS included a category for men because it was felt the WDS needed to be inclusive. In fact, there were 5 men on the original Board of Directors, and men continue to hold not only board membership but higher office as well. In 2014, the WDS membership reached 1,600 members with 5% male members.

The WDS is currently exploring additional programs and activities in order to have an even greater impact on women's health and family issues. The WDS distinguishes itself by its creativity, flexibility, preparation, enthusiasm, passion, and dedicated engaged volunteers. With the addition of the public service programs, there has been a surge of new young members who feel a passion for these activities. Initially, WDS focused on a very successful skin cancer screening program for female tennis professionals and family attendees at major matches. These activities quickly expanded to include new avenues, such as screenings at 52 state fairs.

More recently, a new initiative has been launched at the regional level with the aid of industry expertise. This program will be city and state wide and involve all states. A set format and didactic materials will be developed with focus on practice management, new health care challenges, and new innovations in skin, hair, nail, and mucous membrane disease. The key to the program is appropriate partnering with regional leaders and tapping into the shared educational and business expertise of the dermatology and industry participants.

The success of the WDS has been in its adaptability to the changing times, the energy and talent all its member, the many public activities it has undertaken, its creativity, and its passionate members who lend all their talents to making the WDS a society in which one wants to be a member. It has remained nimble. There is a current membership drive that will ensure the membership of young women and men dermatologists. It will be from this pool of talent that new leadership, focus, and ideas will be found.

The annual WDS luncheon held on the first Sunday of the AAD meetings has continued to be the cornerstone of the WDS and an annual celebration venue that is an integral part of our identity. The feel-good attitude that is palpable at this luncheon can't be missed or repeated by other functions. It is truly a celebration of women's successes.

The supplemental PowerPoint contains a lecture that was delivered by Dr. Wilma F. Bergfeld, inaugural President of the WDS, in the WDS satellite meeting at the International Society of Dermatology world Congress in New Delhi, India, in December 2013. The session was organized by Rashmi Sarkar (India), Wendy Roberts (United States), and Dédé Murrell (Australia).



Dr. Wilma Bergfeld, founder and 1st President of the WDS, in front of the Taj Mahal in 2013 while attending the International Society of Dermatology's world congress in New Delhi, India.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijwd.2015.02.002>.

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