



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH WORKING TOWARDS GENDER EQUITY IN MEDICINE

We are celebrating Women's History Month by sharing the story of an innovative, grass roots leadership development program for women-identifying trainees in Internal Medicine. WiLD was created to address concerns of unequal treatment of women trainees in clinical settings, including at our own hospital. In surfacing and addressing these concerns, our residency program and ZSFG served as an incubator in advancing gender equity in medicine. ZSFG ICU faculty actively participated in discussions and trainings to identify and address unequal treatment of trainees on rounds. Two ZSFG faculty education leaders in the residency program, Dr. Vanessa Thompson and I, worked with colleagues and residents to develop WiLD. This meaningful program has since grown to offer development, support, and networking to trainees across UCSF in support of gender equity.

- Beth Harleman, MD, Vice Chief, ZSFG DOM



WiLD members gather together during a community-building and professional development event.

Developing Bold Leadership

About seven years ago, residents in the UCSF Internal Medicine Residency Program raised concerns about gender-based

discrimination in the workplace.

"Some reported that male attendings would turn to male residents before female residents, and if there was a male-female team, it was usually the woman who wrote the



Vanessa Thompson, MD

orders as the team decided what they were going to do," said Vanessa Thompson, MD, Professor of Medicine in the ZSFG Division of General Internal Medicine, who at the time was the Academic Development Director for the Internal Medicine

question when a male resident asked them, but questioning female residents," said Dr. Thompson. "There were also gender-based comments from patients about female residents' looks or abilities. What spurred us to action was that women residents were talking about their experience of gender-based discrimination in multiple domains."

Dr. Thompson, Beth Harleman, MD, then Associate Program Director of the Internal Medicine Residency Program, Patricia Cornett, MD, then Associate Chair for Education in the Department of Medicine, and Katherine Julian, MD, then Program Director for the UCSF Primary Care General Internal Medicine Residency Program, conducted resident focus groups to elicit more information.

ulty," said Dr. Thompson. Those included Bridget Keenan, MD, PhD, now Assistant Professor in the UCSF Health Division of Hematology-Oncology, and Lekshmi Santhosh, MD, MA, now Associate Professor in the ZSFG Divisions of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine and Hospital Medicine.

While the faculty helped facilitate the response to this challenge, internal medicine residents led the charge to form Women in Leadership Development (WiLD), whose mission is to launch women into their careers to combat systemic gender inequities which hold women back in academic medicine (wild.ucsf.edu). "This has been a very resident-driven effort," said Dr. Thompson.



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WOMEN REPRESENTED IN ZSFG DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE



modest pride in coining the name of the group. “We were looking for something to call ourselves, and I wanted it to be evocative of stepping out of your comfort zone and being bold in leadership,” said Dr. Thompson.

The group’s first initiative was presenting the WiLD Symposium to build community and create a safe space for sharing experiences. This has become an annual event, and topics have included skill-building, negotiating for jobs and promotions, mentoring panels, honing public speaking skills, women as change agents in academic medicine, navigating difficult conversations, and building resilience. The event’s sponsors include the Chancellor’s Commission on the Status of Women.

WiLD Internal Medicine now also includes community-building events, a mentoring series, and other workshops. Dr. Keenan, Dr. Santhosh, and Maggie Emmott Gilbreth, MD, now an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at ZSFG, also went on to create a sister organization, WiLD Graduate Medical Education (GME), which focuses on the needs of all UCSF residents and fellows.

Before becoming a doctor, Dr. Thompson spent a decade in the nonprofit sector working at organizations including San Francisco Women Against

Rape and the California Coalition against Sexual Assault. “As a feminist, I was excited to be a faculty champion for this work,” she said. “During my training, I certainly experienced all the things the residents highlighted [as concerns], but I didn’t call them out explicitly. I want to really honor their voices and the fact that they raised their hands to say, “This is not okay.”

The residents’ leadership in creating WiLD is even more remarkable, given that it emerged during a different era. “This was in its infancy in 2015 or 2016, before #MeToo, and before the racial equity work at UCSF got started in earnest,” said Dr. Thompson. “This was an early movement for learning environment change, and in that way was remarkable.”

While WiLD initially emerged to respond to gender-based discrimination in the residency experience, it has grown to include a larger vision of nurturing women leaders in academic medicine. “Women have a unique and more challenging experience training and practicing in medicine,” said Dr. Thompson. “There are ways that we as women can come together to support each other to navigate that differential experience. Our fundamental vision is to help women develop the skills, experience, and confidence to enter leadership positions in medicine, change the culture to make

for providers and patients, and allow women to thrive in the U.S. health care system.”

Building Community, Enhancing Skills

“I was drawn to WiLD for its mission of empowering women with leadership skills, and creating a community to talk about experiences that women-identifying trainees face in the clinical space,” said third-year internal medicine resident Ruchi Shah, MD. Last year she served as co-director of the WiLD Symposium, helping to plan and curate the talks and reflection sessions for the full-day curriculum, and this year she co-directs WiLD Internal Medicine as a whole.

“WiLD Internal Medicine has three main pillars: the WiLD Symposium, mentorship, and community building,” said Dr. Shah. The theme of this year’s symposium, held on March 23, was “Restore and Rebuild.” “As we progress through the COVID pandemic and think about all the challenges our residents have overcome, we’re beginning to restore ourselves and rebuild a sense of community and resilience,” she said.

For the first time, the WiLD leadership team organized volunteer activities in the community for the first half of the symposium. The afternoon featured didactic and skill-building sessions, including one on code leading. “When there is a



Code Blue in the hospital, often women-identifying trainees face challenges having their voice heard,” said Dr. Shah.



Ruchi Shah, MD

“The general advice is to stand at the head of the bed, command the room, and use a loud voice to announce that you are the doctor in the room and are running the code. That’s great advice, but it’s challenging when everyone turns to a male

medical student and says, ‘Doctor, what are we doing?’ And you say, ‘Oh, it’s me, actually, running the rapid response.’ That happens much more frequently than you would imagine. Especially being a woman of color who is very petite, I’m often not expected to be the physician. We wanted a space to share those experiences and help both women and male-identifying residents think about how we can build structures to help women when they’re running a code.”

This year’s symposium also included a workshop on resiliency in medicine, including ways to decrease burnout and increase the sense of fulfillment over the long run, and a panel of recent alumni who shared challenges and triumphs as fellows and early-career faculty. There were also social events before and after the symposium to further build community.

Attendance at the annual WiLD Symposium is mandatory for all second- and third-year internal medicine residents on ambulatory block, and other trainees and faculty are also welcome to participate. “It speaks to support we’ve received as an organization to empower us to plan the symposium and enable residents to learn about this important topic in medicine,” said Dr. Shah. “We’ve received autonomy with support from [residency] program leadership, which is really exciting”

Throughout the year, WiLD Internal Medicine leads several other programs to foster mentorship, including a welcome event to connect new interns with their peers and senior residents. This year, WiLD initiated periodic fellowship subspecialty dinners. These informal events are held at local restaurants, and allow women residents to meet with fellows and faculty in various subspecial-

ties. The first dinner, held in February, focused on hematology-oncology. “Sometimes there are additional burdens of time, finances, and energy placed on women who choose to be involved in mentorship,” said Dr. Shah. “Instead of just having one-on-one meetings with many people, we want to lessen those burdens, make it as fruitful and enjoyable as possible, and develop sustainable solutions that are productive for everyone involved.”

WiLD Internal Medicine also hosts curricula and community-building events, including talks about financial planning and negotiation strategies. One recent session focused on family planning and fertility, including expert speakers from the UCSF Center for Reproductive Health, as well as trainees who have chosen to freeze their eggs. “There have been a few recent New York Times articles suggesting that there is a higher rate of miscarriage and complications among people trying to conceive in training programs, which is not something that’s often talked about,” said Dr. Shah.

In addition to this more formal programming, WiLD Internal Medicine convenes social activities such as informal wine and cheese nights, which allow participants to share about their clinical experiences in a safe environment, and to further build a sense of community.

Dr. Shah appreciates how WiLD Internal Medicine has supported her in developing her leadership style. “I’ve learned how to delegate effectively, both to our team, but also utilizing the expertise of our attendings and chief residents,” she said. “As part of our resiliency training, I have also learned more about boundary setting, such as committing your time to limited activities and learning it’s okay to say ‘No.’ That also applies to developing skills to navigate challenging situations in a professional environment. When responding to a microaggression, what words and phrases can I use that are firm, direct, and still allow me to maintain a therapeutic relationship with patients or colleagues? WiLD has helped me find the strength and vocabulary to own that leadership role.”

Dr. Shah looks forward to applying these leadership skills in the future. This summer she will start an allergy and immunology fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, and plans to get involved there with an affinity group

similar to WiLD. She also hopes to join a working group of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology that strives to improve medical education for women trainees, as well as address gender-based health care disparities. “Long-term, I would love to be involved with advocacy, creating a safe learning environment, and helping to create mentorship pipelines for others, most likely in an academic setting,” she said.

“UCSF has a really robust culture of advocacy,” said Dr. Shah. “I’m so grateful for all the co-leaders on our team, and one of the most rewarding aspects of this work is how much I’ve learned from them. It’s really powerful to have a group of women you work so well with. We support each other in a shared mission and have a really incredible sense of community. It’s been exciting to see how the organization has evolved over time, and how we’ve been able to implement new ideas which will hopefully have longevity.”

Expanding the Circle

When Jessie Holtzman, MD, was a medical student, she first learned how underrepresented



Jessie Holtzman, MD

women were in leadership roles in medicine. “Although women and men were applying and matriculating into medical school at similar rates, as you went up the chain to becoming a full professor, dean of a medical school, or head of a professional society, there were fewer and fewer women,” she said.

“Over the years, I’ve delved deeper into the data to think about why we need to be developing leadership skills of women at earlier stages,” said Dr. Holtzman. “That’s really driven my passion. It’s not only an ethical imperative. You can also make the business case: McKinsey recently did a study that found that teams with greater than 30 percent women in leadership outperformed teams with 10 to 30 percent women in leadership. More diverse teams perform better.”

As an internal medicine intern at UCSF, she attended a WiLD orientation event. “That helped me know that I now had a network of women who



I could go to in the hospital at two in the morning who would back me up, no matter what I needed,” said Dr. Holtzman. As a third-year resident, she helped organize the WiLD Symposium. As a ZSFG chief resident for inpatient care, she has supported the WiLD Internal Medicine leadership team. She also became co-president of WiLD GME, a role she will continue to hold next year as a UCSF cardiology fellow. “At our first WiLD GME event this year, we had people RSVP from 27 different programs, from anesthesiology to neurology to pathology to reproductive endocrinology, highlighting how common many of these challenges are across medicine specialties,” she said.

WiLD Internal Medicine and WiLD GME have complementary yet distinct areas of focus. “A lot of WiLD Internal Medicine is focused on community building,” said Dr. Holtzman. “As interns, it’s very reassuring to know other people in the residency, and to establish immediate community. We want interns to feel like they have a home and a family here at UCSF. Residency can be a very isolating time, so we think about how we can use our network of women to provide support during that very stressful period. There’s also a focus on how to get to the next stage, which often means applying for fellowship, whether that’s in hospital medicine, cardiology, or another specialty.”

“One of WiLD GME’s goals is providing skills to navigate that transition point between training roles and early academic roles,” said Dr. Holtzman. “Many of our talks focus specifically on negotiating your first contract: what can you negotiate for? Who should you go to for advice? How can you strategically plan your CV to initiate academic development and advancement? Those things are something of a black box when we’re residents and fellows.”

“It’s been an incredible learning, to think strategically about how to bring others into the room with you to fight for gender equity,” said Dr. Holtzman. She is inspired by a WiLD speaker’s amplification of a Ruth Bader Ginsberg quote: “Fight for the things you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.”

Dr. Holtzman appreciates the opportunity to connect with the broader network of women’s organizations at UCSF, including women’s leadership

organizations within the schools of nursing and dentistry, WARM (Women’s Advancement and Recognition in Medicine) Hearts – a peer networking organization for women faculty at ZSFG – and her recent work helping to plan UCSF’s programming for International Women’s Day.

She also appreciates how WiLD Internal Medicine and WiLD GME complement other Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts at UCSF. “Our hope is that our organization embraces intersectionality to the fullest extent,” said Dr. Holtzman. “Though our specific focus is combatting systemic gender inequities in academic medicine, we think about how that particular challenge complements some of the other challenges we face. We all have many intersecting parts of our identity, and we’ve thought a lot about how we can act as allies to all our other affinity communities to provide a strong network of support across the institution.”

Achieving gender equity is a long-term endeavor. “The issue of gender parity in the workplace isn’t new,” said Dr. Holtzman. “My grandmother worked in advertising in the 1950s, and she tells these incredible stories about how she would be turned away from restaurants because they thought she wouldn’t be able to afford lunch because she was a woman. We’re improving, but it’s happening slowly. In 2013, 16 percent of deans of medical schools were women; in 2018, it was 18 percent. We hope that WiLD is giving women the tools to continue pushing that bar forward. It will take examining and reporting the data, tracking outcomes, and publishing results. Not all of that will come out of a women’s affinity organization, but I hope it will provide women with the skills to combat some of these inequities.”

As a UCSF cardiology fellow next year and in her career as an academic cardiologist, she looks forward to honing her leadership skills and mentoring female trainees. “It’s important to continue building that curriculum that gives medical students, residents, and fellows the skills they need to step into leadership roles,” said Dr. Holtzman. She is grateful to Drs. Gilbreth, Keenan, and Santosh for their groundbreaking work in founding WiLD. “They put years and years of thoughtful work into WiLD’s development, conducting a systematic needs assessment and locating grant funding,” said Dr. Holtzman. “We owe them a



Created as a an interdepartmental community of women physicians at ZSFG, WARM Hearts connects members from all departments and at all career stages. Founded in 2010 by Christina Mangurian, MD, MAS, Department of Psychiatry, the organization was originally supported by the UCSF Committee on the Status of Women and the SFGH Foundation. It now receives support from the UCSF Dean’s Office at ZSFG.

Urmimala Sarkar, MD, Division of General Internal Medicine, served as past chair and currently serves on the leadership council with **Delphine Tuot, MD, Division of Nephrology**.

WARM Hearts holds monthly meetings and professional development activities. Please contact Chair Valerie Gribben, MD, at warmhearts@ucsf.edu if interested in joining.

huge debt of gratitude, as well as all the other leaders of women’s organizations at UCSF who put in all the extra time to build this community. We have the luxury of being in medicine at a time where we’re getting closer to gender parity, thanks to all the work they have done.”

Dr. Holtzman encourages trainees to reach out with questions and feedback. “We’re open to any ideas and areas that people identify as gaps,” she said. “We’re a facilitating organization that can bring people the skills they feel they need.”

She greatly appreciates the supportive culture for women at UCSF. “We’re so fortunate at UCSF to see women role models everywhere,” said Dr. Holtzman. “It pushes us all to be better. No matter where our careers ultimately take us, we can take the skills we gain here at UCSF and spread this great work to other parts of the country.”

Elizabeth Chur

Editors: Neil Powe, Laurae Pearson, Brooks Bigart

SPOTLIGHT

Peter Hunt, MD, Division of Experimental Medicine, was named the inaugural ZSFG Department of Medicine Associate Chief of Research.