

# Women in medicine

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## Aims

To highlight and celebrate the role of women in medicine in 2017, the first year in history that women outnumbered men in leading the British and Irish medical royal colleges.

## Methods

A 'women in medicine' steering group was established at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) in 2016 to explore ways of celebrating women in medicine. Funding for an exhibition was sourced through a tripartite approach including legacy funding through the RCP, approaching individual colleges, and a generous contribution from the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation. Contact was made with all of the medical royal colleges throughout the British Isles, most faculties and other medical organisations. Twenty-eight participating organisations then nominated a single inspirational female doctor from their organisation, who in turn selected a historic (deceased) inspirational female doctor. Biographies were written about both the women and a photographic portrait taken of the modern woman holding a framed picture of her historic inspiration. These portraits were transformed into the hanging banners which constitute the RCP exhibition 'Women in medicine: a celebration' which ran from September 2017–January 2018. A traveling exhibition was developed at the same time to ensure the exhibition lives on and continues to inspire for years to come.

## Results

The exhibition was launched internally at the new members' ceremony on 27 September 2017 and to the public on 3 October 2017 with over 100 guests in attendance. Media coverage was wide and favourable. BBC *Woman's Hour* broadcast five interviews with five different participants of the exhibition; the *Lancet* described the exhibition as a 'breath of fresh air' at the RCP, and *Nature* reported that the women's photographic portraits 'now outshine the sombre stares of the imposing men' in the Lasdun Hall! Many more publications praised the originality and timeliness of the exhibition.

We were inundated with positive feedback and requests for tours from groups of medical students from as far and wide as Italy and the USA, the Girls' Network, other groups of local school children, groups of GPs and groups from other royal colleges. These groups

came to the RCP for tours of the exhibition and left feeling very inspired.

## Conclusion

This exhibition both celebrates the role of women in the medicine, and highlights the importance of gender equality in medicine. The support and feedback on the exhibition has been staggering. Interestingly many of the young aspiring medics who came for a tour reported how surprised they were at discovering the highest profile roles of some current women in medicine.

Inspirational is the word most commonly used to describe this exhibition. It has drawn attention to some of the most esteemed and trailblazing female medical leaders, as well as to the sometimes forgotten achievements and struggles of bygone women in medicine. In this way the exhibition has achieved its objectives of shining a light on the positive impact women have made in medicine both for those in the profession and those considering embarking on a career in medicine. ■

## Conflict of interest statement

Johnny Boylan is the coordinator of the exhibition. Professor Dacre sits on the women in medicine steering group.

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