Challenge or opportunity—the importance of women in orthopedics

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Background
Based on an identified gap of diverse leadership, within and beyond the AO Foundation (a medically guided, not-for-profit organization led by an international group of surgeons specialized in treatment of trauma and disorders of the musculoskeletal system), research was initiated to identify and overcome barriers, to promote diversity with a first focus on female leadership within the organization.

Summary of work
Based on the gap of women holding faculty, governance and leadership roles using quantitative and qualitative data, AO continues to collect data for further identification and analysis of barriers and how to overcome these to create and promote a diverse member community, teaching and leadership body within the organization.

Discussion
How can AO change:
• Commitment to change, working group to address the change, budget, implement plan, assess outcomes
• Diversity statement, inclusive and diverse job advertisements, transparent process
• Unconscious bias training, mentor- and fellowship programs
• Adjust policies, nominate capable women and minorities, ensure women and minority representatives in committees/commissions

Female/male distribution of clinical course participants within the organization. with a first focus on female leadership over come barriers, to promote diversity.

Female/male distribution of faculty development programs across regions and AO clinical divisions from 2016–2018

Female/male distribution for regional and international boards by AO clinical division (status Nov 2018)

Top ten specialties by size (2013–14)

% of Women in Orthopedic Surgery

Conclusion
Research shows that diverse groups are more creative and effective in problem solving, making an organization more resilient and adaptable; leading to benefits in research and innovation, as well as increased funding opportunities; all the above leading to improved patient health care. Patients want surgeons to look like them, with young graduates being more likely to engage with organizations with people in leadership positions serving as role models that one can associate with. Both aspects are important for future sustainability and success.

Take-home messages
AO is actively seeking to create a paradigm shift, increasing diversity and women in orthopedics. Identifying the diversity gap, and its barriers, leads to concrete steps to be developed and implemented. This will allow people and AO to transform, approaching diversity on a comprehensive rather than an event-based approach.

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