

The ESCMID Parity Commission's first meeting

The ESCMID Parity Commission (EPC) was founded to review and improve representation of minorities, gender and geographic balance in the fields of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. Its members include: Evelina Tacconelli (Chair), ESCMID Professional Affairs Officer Infectious Diseases, Elisabeth Nagy (Chair), ESCMID Professional Affairs Officer Clinical Microbiology, Nur Benzonana, ESCMID Advocate for Minorities, Laetitia Kortbeek, ESCMID Advocate for Gender Balance, Mario Poljak, ESCMID Advocate for Geographic Balance. The work of the three Advocates is to be closely connected.

The aims of the EPC are:

1. to improve gender representation and geographic balance within the ESCMID and related Educational activities;
2. to tutor young female scientists and scientists from resources-poor countries and from minorities groups;
3. to link ESCMID and national societies to bridge the gap of gender, economical status and minorities.

In the first couple of years the Commission will focus on the first two objectives. The third goal is also very important but will be considered as a mid-term goal. First steps include a clear definition for "minority" and an evaluation of representation within ESCMID and ECCMID.

In addition, the EPC agreed to focus also on aspects of gender/sex differences in risk factors, biological mechanisms, clinical manifestation, and treatment of disease and disorders in the fields of infection.

During the meeting the EPC reviewed statistical data from ESCMID that showed that women are still underrepresented in important positions in the Society (e.g. as ECCMID speakers and chairs, ESCMID Executive Committee) as well in the ECCMID. Data also showed that there is a lack of geographic balance in the ECCMID scientific programme.

For this reason the Commission will closely collaborate with TAE, ESCMID Education Officer and ECCMID programme Director concerning ESCMID educational activities (advisory role).

Data from others sources were also analyzed to investigate the relevance of the problem from a European point of view. Whereas there are many studies regarding gender balance in sciences (the majority financed through recent European Frameworks) there are very few studies on geographic balance and minorities.

Data shows that there is a substantial gender imbalance in medical sciences, women making up half the students population, but holding only 15 % of senior academic positions on average. Studies investigated the so called "glass ceiling" phenomenon whereby women do not advance to the most senior position in their fields. Contributing factors to this phenomenon are diverse such as exclusion of women from the informal and formal power structures, inadequate accommodation of pregnancy and family, lack of mentorship available to women. For example, mentors can have significant impact on one's professional advancement, and some physicians believe success "is impossible without a sponsor who will promote, protect, and in other ways enhance one's professional fortunes."

The Commission has a number of activities planned for the coming months. These include:

1. Obtaining statistical data from ESCMID/ECCMID
2. Conducting a survey on how to define the entity of discrimination (country; gender; minorities) among ID/CM specialists in their employment and roles within universities in Europe.
3. Elaboration of articles and editorials to increase the awareness of the presence of discrimination in the scientific community (ID/CM);
4. Increase the awareness through elaboration of data and articles
5. Closely collaborate with Trainee Association of ESCMID and the ESCMID Education Officer concerning educational activities
6. Participate in the organization of ECCMID and other ESCMID Scientific events (advisory role)
7. Involve Editors of major ID/CM journals
8. Provide guidance for mentoring and tutoring programmes.

The Parity Commission will keep you updated on our activities through the ESCMID website and newsletter.

Evelina Tacconelli, ESCMID Professional Affairs Officer Infectious Diseases, Co-chair of the ESCMID Parity Commission on behalf of the Parity Commission



ESCMID Parity Commission in Rome during meeting on 5 September 2010.

(l. to r.) Elisabeth Nagy (Chair), ESCMID Professional Affairs Officer Clinical Microbiology, Mario Poljak, ESCMID Advocate for Geographic Balance, Nur Benzonana, ESCMID Advocate for Minorities, Evelina Tacconelli (Chair), ESCMID Professional Affairs Officer Infectious Diseases, Laetitia Kortbeek, ESCMID Advocate for Gender Balance.