Taking the Pulse of America’s Medical Schools

Two deans share their perspectives about the issues and the future

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careers and leadership roles. The lack of encouragement is compounded by a shortage of compelling role models. Undergraduate women have very little exposure to successful senior women in academic science and medicine. This is unfortunate because role models are important. They show you what's possible and, especially for women, show that it's possible for someone like you to succeed in academic medicine.

Early in my career, I experienced many of the same roadblocks that other women in academic medicine face—less salary, less lab space, less administrative support—compared with men at the same level. It was often hard to make my voice heard, and I was often the only woman in the room, or one of very few, at important meetings. But I also had several advantages that made a tremendous difference. First, I truly believed that I could do whatever I wanted to do, as long as I worked hard enough. Second, becoming a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator soon after joining the faculty leveled the playing field for me in my research career. And third, probably most important, I had mentors who not only taught me how things worked, but also advocated for me and opened doors for me.

**Dean Glimcher:** When I started in medical school, I was at Harvard, and there was definitely an unconscious bias against women. Something as simple as going on medical rounds, if there was a male resident, a male intern, and a female intern, the resident would always address all of his remarks to the male intern and attending physicians and completely ignore the female intern.

That sounds like a small thing, but it really conveys the message to a female intern that you’re not significant, that your opinion and thoughts don’t matter. In situations like that I had to learn how to make myself heard. It wasn’t always easy, particularly when you’re not in a position of authority.

A major challenge that a lot of female physician-scientists face is building a career while also raising children. I was lucky to have my parents living nearby and willing to help with child care when I was in my early 30s, which is when a lot of young faculty are suddenly faced with becoming a faculty member, starting their own labs, and building up their clinical practices, as well as starting a family.

When I was president of the American Association of Immunologists, I started a program

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