

American Medical Women's Association Position Statement:

Sex and Gender Based Health

**Authors: Mary Rojek, PhD
Claudia Morrissey Conlon, MD, MPH, FAMWA**

**Justina Trott, MD, FACP
Janice Werbinski, MD, FACOG**

July 2020

Replaces 2008 Position Paper

VISION: To integrate sex and gender knowledge into medical and other health professions education and practice to improve healthcare for all.

AMWA advocates for:

1. Public policies that recognize and specifically address sex and gender influences on every aspect of a person's health.
2. Public policies that recognize and specifically account for the intersectionality of other social factors with sex and gender such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and sexual identity, socioeconomic status, and rural/urban location and the impact of these on health.
3. Policies that ensure that all aspects of medical and other health professions' clinical healthcare delivery are held to standards that reflect these principles.
4. The preservation of the national offices of Women's Health already established in the U.S., e.g., the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control, US Health and Human Services, and the Food and Drug Administration, and for the development of other appropriate offices of Women's Health at the federal level.
5. Continuing research about sex and gender's influence on health and illness, for researchers to include sex as a variable in research at all levels (cellular, animal, and human), and that data for all conditions that can impact both men and women be analyzed and disaggregated by sex and/or gender.
6. The incorporation of sex and gender specific curricula into all forms of physician and health provider education, including medical and other health professions schools, residencies, fellowships, training programs, and continuing education across specialties.
7. The accreditation of healthcare schools to be linked to the incorporation of sex and gender specific content into medical and other health professions' education.
8. A method of certification that informs consumers when their provider has attained sufficient education specific to sex and gender based research and practice.

AMWA believes that healthcare delivered to women, men, and gender non-conforming individuals should be comprehensive, based on sex and gender specific research, and be

available, accessible, and affordable. However, this can only occur if research results are reported based on sex and gender. Similarly, there is an intersection between sex/gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexuality which should also be factored into research and healthcare in order to provide patient-centered care. We support funding of Sex and Gender Based Health (SGBH) research and the development and availability of appropriate curricula that reflects that research. There is a critical need to translate that information into the clinical practices of all providers who take care of patients.

Sex and Gender Based Health

Sex and Gender Based Health (SGBH) is a perspective that examines the impact of sex as a biological variable and gender as a sociocultural variable on health and illness in all patients, i.e., men, women, girls, boys, and gender-nonconforming individuals. As a biological variable, sex is determined by a person's sex chromosomes and autosomes. In contrast, gender refers to identities, roles, behaviors, and expression along a continuum of feminine to masculine, but it also includes gender non-conforming and other gendered expressions.

In adopting a sex and gender lens, we can remedy the invisibility of many women's health issues while improving healthcare for all. In a broad sense, SGBH can be thought of as referring to the differences in health and illness between men and women. However, it also encompasses intersex and LGBTQIA health issues, and it recognizes that other socially constructed categories such as race/ethnicity affect health. SGBH can be a foundation for how to think about and research all determinants of health that contribute to health disparities because every person has a sex and a gender. When applied in the clinical setting, this perspective will enable clinicians to provide patient-centered care, and it will ultimately improve patient outcomes. SGBH is relevant to all healthcare fields including medicine, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, public health, and the allied health professions. We advocate that education, research, and clinical care in all healthcare fields take sex and gender differences into account.

SGBH and Bias in Research

Historically, nearly all health research was conducted on men. Women were excluded from research for many reasons, including the belief that women's bodies were too complex to study, that women's bodies were just like men's but only differed in size, and that the fetus must be protected from the potential teratogenic effects of drugs. The dearth of research on women has resulted in erroneous beliefs about health and illness in women. However, it has also limited our understanding of disease processes in men. This bias is further compounded when differences and unique health needs across sub-groups are not acknowledged. More recently, while more women have been included in research studies, the data are often not being analyzed or reported by sex. Simply noting in a publication the number of women and men included in a study is not sufficient.

Translation of Research into Education and Clinical Care

Previous studies have limited generalizability to clinical care because they have relied on data primarily based on male laboratory animals and men's bodies. By including female laboratory animals and women in research, the research findings can be integrated into curricula, and can then be applied to the clinical care of women. This will ultimately result in improvements in healthcare for all patients.

Applying a sex and gender lens toward research and public health policy can help elucidate the complex interconnections between sex (a genetic and hormonal determinant of health) and gender (a social determinant of health) at both the individual and population levels. While researchers might decide to focus solely on biology (sex) or social factors (gender) in their own research, SGBH encourages the study of the intersection of the social environment with biology. In reality, these two factors are interwoven. Sex and gender are foundational factors in health and illness, and thus should become foundational in both research and clinical care. Additionally, sub-group analyses must be conducted to determine if there are differences based on race/ethnicity.

Research findings demonstrate that only a small percentage of practicing providers and trainees incorporate sex and gender research findings into clinical practice. Surveys confirm that students and trainees have significant gaps in their knowledge of SGBH because these topics are infrequently included in most curricula. Furthermore, there is very little literature about education and training for faculty in terms of being facile in this content and in the teaching of this content to all tiers of learners. In order to address these deficiencies, there is a global need for all health professions' educators to bring a sex and gender perspective into their courses and into clinical training. In addition, accrediting bodies should hold healthcare professional teaching institutions accountable for including this material to ensure that their graduates are competent in caring for all patients.

AMWA's Sex and Gender Health Collaborative

Since 2008, AMWA has supported the Sex and Gender Health Collaborative (SGHC), which advocates for a sex and gender approach to all research, education, clinical guidelines, evaluation methods, devices and medications in all health professions.

AMWA's [SGHC Website](#) provides an extensive list of resources for those interested in learning more about Sex and Gender Based Health. It lists textbooks, journals, pivotal articles, case studies, learning modules, Medical Education modules, organizations, institutions, institutes, Power Point Slide Sets, and more. Serving as a social site to stimulate discussion of new ideas and share concepts and resources, it houses an SGBH Practitioner Registry of providers who have completed additional study in SGBH.

References

1. [Sex and Gender Based Medicine in Clinical Education Annotated Bibliography](#)
2. [Sex and Gender Health Collaborative Website](#)

