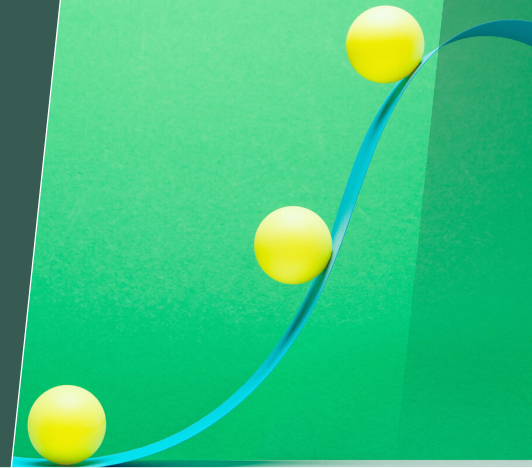


# Women in Medicine: How Healthcare Organizations Can Address the Needs of Women Physicians



This four-part series builds on the insights delivered in *Women in Medicine: Setting the Agenda for Change*, a collaboration between Korn Ferry and the American Medical Women's Association, and focuses on the roles of medicine, healthcare organizations, leaders, and physicians in helping women achieve fulfillment and success in their medical careers.

This article offers healthcare organizations strategies and tactics to address the concerns women physicians confront throughout their careers. Opportunities abound -- from respecting women physicians' multiple identities to offering flexibility, providing leave, and investing in education and training around these various issues. The following are recommendations and action steps.

## **WOMEN PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING**

### *Recognize women physicians' barriers to leadership.*

- Confront discrimination in the form of sexual harassment, hostile work environments, and subtle biases.
- Enhance flexible options so women physicians can better balance work, family, and personal life.
- Operationalize professional support via mentors, sponsors, and networks.

### *Promote the advantages of women physician leaders.*

- Analyze the impact of benefits like a healthier balance sheet and a future-focused brand presence.
- Measure and track the impact of women physician leaders on factors like creativity, innovation, openness, social responsibility, and consumer and patient experience.
- Make gender diversity and equity in leadership a strategic imperative endorsed by C-suite and board executives.
- Avoid focusing on clinical, financial, and operational

performance at the expense of gender equity and DEI performance.

- Transition to an enterprise-wide commitment to gender parity in leadership supported by quarterly board meetings, reporting, and C-Suite accountability.
- Invest in technologies that enable tracking gender equity/parity performance and facilitate rapid interventions during leadership crises.
- Ensure pay equity.

### *Design programs that contribute to the advancement of women physicians.*

- Build and reinforce mentorship and affinity group programs supported by unconscious bias training and recognition and reward events.
- Gather data to evaluate program impact and inform future program design.

"Organizations need to ensure that women physicians are heard," says Liz Bickley, COO, Korn Ferry Health. "Leaders should invite and encourage women who seek leadership positions to speak up and engage with colleagues through committees and task forces."

- Transition to outcomes-based programs that focus on high-priority professional and personal needs identified by women physicians.

***Develop recruitment plans aimed at increasing gender diversity.***

- Identify recruitment goals—from wanting to build a more secure physician talent pipeline to improving retention.
- Forecast future needs for women physicians by reviewing variables like organizational structure, promotions, attrition and turnover, growth and expansion, and gaps in leadership knowledge, skills, and experience.
- Consider your physician value proposition to identify why women physicians choose your organization over competitors.
- Evaluate how well you communicate your organization's brand.
- Build a selection process that ensures gender parity in the selection and evaluation of candidates.
- Design an onboarding process that sets up women physicians for success.
- Invest in technologies that facilitate physician applicant tracking and physician onboarding and engagement.

***Support the career development and advancement of women physicians.***

- Support women physicians' career goals by conducting sessions with feedback on career paths, achievement milestones, leadership opportunities, and essential resources.
- Promote the professional development of women physicians through virtual or in-person conferences, courses, workshops, and seminars.
- Encourage mentorship and sponsorship.
- Support the work-life balance of women physicians via flexible policies that allow them to thrive personally and professionally.
- Remind women physicians of how they contribute to organizational mission, vision, values, and strategy fulfillment.
- Create a succession planning process that reflects an organizational commitment to professional development and leadership.

***Develop and implement strategic thinking.***

- Calculate the ROI of gender equity and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within organizations and society.

- Frame and reframe business, clinical, and market challenges in medicine.

- Lead performance and growth through innovation in medicine.

- Prepare women physicians to lead high-performance teams, task forces, and committees.

- Leverage the talent of interdisciplinary task forces, teams, and committees.

**MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR WOMEN PHYSICIANS**

The mental health of women physicians is a top priority. Women report feeling more burned out than their male colleagues, with the most significant stress experienced by mothers, senior women executives, and Black women. Some women report wanting to downshift careers, change jobs, or leave the workforce entirely.

*"Organizations need to look out for stereotypes and biases that stymie women physicians' careers," says Eliza Lo Chin, MD, MPH, Executive Director, AMWA. "Leaders may not be able to control the stereotypes people bring to the workplace, but they can control how the culture responds."*

Healthcare organizations should make mental health and well-being a strategic priority. Recommendations and action steps include the following:

***Make mental wellness an enterprise-wide priority.***

- Encourage C-suite executives and physician leaders to drive the conversation on mental wellness.
- Create and promote a culture where women physicians feel acknowledged and free to share feelings and challenges.

***Invest in mental health resources and promote their availability.***

- Reach beyond standard solutions like employee assistance programs and mental health days.
- Identify a professional who can move through the organization and identify sources of mental wellness support. Host forums where medical leaders discuss mental wellness and sources of help and support.
- Invest in tools and resources like mental wellness assessments, clinical screenings for depression, anxiety,

and burnout, subsidized counseling, coaching and therapy, and stress management

**Remove the stigma of mental health treatment, counseling, and therapy.**

- Offer enterprise-wide mental health and wellness programming, including prevention, emergency interventions, and ongoing treatment.
- Train executives, managers, and medical colleagues on how to recognize and respond to signs of depression, anxiety, and burnout
- Prevent stigmatizing mental health language while integrating mental health conditions into the organization's DEI agenda.
- Promote the organization's commitment to mental and physical health by addressing workplace policies, benefits, and programs.
- Educate physician leaders on the importance of giving equal attention to mental and physical health through a physician well-being coordinator.
- Reframe credentialing mental health questions to focus on current impairment.

**COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS FOR WOMEN PHYSICIANS**

While physician compensation increased in 2022, gender and racial income gaps continue. According to Medscape, male primary care physicians earn 25 percent more than women primary care physicians, while male specialists earn 31 percent more than women specialists. Additionally, white physicians earn 11 percent more than African American/Black physicians and 5 more than Latinx/Hispanic and Asian American physicians.



Organizations can take action to close the gender pay gap by offering compensation and benefits programs that address the needs of women physicians. Recommendations and actions include the following:

- Audit and review physician compensation by gender

and race, including supplemental forms of payment like bonuses and access to special perks.

- Conduct ongoing compensation reviews to measure, monitor, and eradicate gender-based pay discrepancies.
- Review physician hiring practices, including starting salaries, hiring based on salary history, and salary negotiations by women physicians.
- Ensure fairness and equity in promotions and leadership opportunities by developing consistent criteria for performance appraisals and appointments to committees, task forces, and teams.
- Offer all physicians salary and compensation transparency, including reports on pay audits and adjustments to ensure pay equity.
- Educate clinical staff and physician leaders on how gender and racial bias influence compensation and benefits decision-making.
- Offer physicians family planning benefits.
- Provide or expand backup childcare via on-site childcare centers and online access to childcare services.
- Provide women physicians with career paths and advancement opportunities through promotions and professional appointment pathways.
- Offer financial support for programs that upskill, reskill, or deliver micro-credentials or certificates.

**CONCLUSION**

Healthcare organizations can build cultures that foster gender equity and strengthen the careers of women physicians. They can conduct regular compensation audits, deliver mental wellness support, and offer the flexibility women physicians need to balance the demands of home and work. They can also provide roadmaps, blueprints, and ladders to medical leadership opportunities via career planning, education, and training.

Read more about the Korn Ferry-AMWA Report, *Women in Medicine: Setting the Agenda for Change*.

[bit.ly/amwakfreport](https://bit.ly/amwakfreport)

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### About AMWA

The American Medical Women's Association is a multi-specialty organization of women physicians committed to advancing women in medicine, advocating for equity, and ensuring excellence in health care.

### About Korn Ferry

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