

Advancing Gender Equity in Health: The Role of Medical Women's International Association

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As Presidents of the Medical Women's International Association (MWIA) and its affiliated national body, the Medical Women's Association of Pakistan (MWAP), we are honored to contribute to this special edition of the *Journal of University College of Medicine and Dentistry*. Advancing gender equity in health is at the core of our mission, as emphasized in the MWIA 2022–2025 President's theme: "*One Humanity: Health Solutions through Our Partnerships*." Globally, women face significant barriers to quality healthcare, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where cultural stigma, economic constraints, and systemic biases exacerbate these disparities. Women health professionals also experience gender inequities, further hindering efforts to close the health gap. Overcoming these challenges requires a holistic, collaborative approach—one that upholds our shared humanity while addressing the diverse needs of individuals.¹

At MWIA, we are tackling these challenges through strategic partnerships that drive meaningful change.² As part of a diverse group of experts, MWIA contributed to the co-creation of the *Opportunity Map* at the Innovation Equity Forum (IEF) held in 2023. Designed to amplify underrepresented voices, this initiative highlights the unique perspectives of women in research and development, ensuring their contributions shape global health solutions. One of our flagship initiatives is our participation in the *Innovation Partnerships, Equity 2030 Alliance* with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This alliance prioritizes women-centric research, focusing on the development of diagnostic tools, treatments, vaccines, and reproductive health solutions tailored to women's needs. Launched at the World Health Summit in Berlin, this collaboration is instrumental in elevating women's health as a global priority.

MWIA is also proud to partner with the *Every Woman Treaty* coalition, a powerful alliance of 1,700 women's rights activists and 840 organizations across 128 nations. This coalition is advocating for a binding global norm to end violence against women and girls, recognizing gender-based violence as a critical public health issue with far-reaching consequences. In addition, MWIA is actively addressing the health needs

of refugees through its involvement in the *Group of Friends-Health* under the *Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)*, co-chaired by UNHCR and WHO. Led by MWAP, this initiative provides gender-sensitive healthcare solutions to vulnerable populations, ensuring that refugee women receive essential medical care.

Our commitment to global health extends to our partnership with the *Global Sepsis Alliance* and endorsement of the *Berlin Declaration on Sepsis*. At the 2024 World Sepsis Congress, MWIA emphasized the urgent need for improved sepsis diagnosis and treatment, particularly for women and children, underscoring our role in shaping global health policies. Furthermore, our collaboration with *Lehigh University's United Nations Youth Representative Program* reflects our investment in future healthcare leadership. By supporting youth engagement in NGOs across five continents, we are nurturing the next generation of health advocates committed to gender equity and inclusive healthcare.³

National Initiatives: Driving Change in Pakistan

At the national level, MWAP is addressing gender disparities in the healthcare workforce through targeted initiatives. We recently conducted a workshop on "*Building a Respectful and Harassment-Free Workplace*," led by Prof. Nazish Imran, alongside ongoing *Orientation Seminars* that explore the legal, social, and institutional aspects of workplace harassment in Pakistan. To provide further support, MWAP's *Counselling Cell*, directed by Dr. Aysa Zaheer (counsellingcellmwap@gmail.com), offers guidance for those affected by workplace harassment.⁴

A Call to Action

At MWIA, we view these partnerships not merely as strategic alliances but as vital components of our mission to build a more equitable world. Through intergenerational, multidisciplinary, and cross-sectoral collaboration, we are advancing inclusive and accessible health solutions. We invite our colleagues and partners to join us in this mission. As MWIA President Dr. Eleanor

Nwadinobi affirms, “*Elbows locked*”—together, we can bridge the gender gap in health and create a future where healthcare knows no gender.

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