

# Are there too many women in medicine?

30 November 2011

In the UK, women doctors are set to outnumber their male counterparts by 2017. The press has dubbed the rise "worrying" and "bad for medicine" but in an editorial published by *Student BMJ* today, Maham Khan asks is medicine becoming overfeminised and is having too many female doctors bad practice?

Jane Dacre, Medical School Director at University College London, believes feminisation is a fact, but disagrees that medicine is becoming overfeminised and suggests that the rise of women doctors is bridging the gender divide. "I don't think we have yet reached an era of feminisation. What we are doing is reaching equality," she says.

Many studies show women dominate in specialties such as general practice, paediatrics, and palliative care, but some branches of medicine, such as cardiology and general surgery, remain closed or unattractive to women, according to consultant cardiologist, Professor Jean McEwan.

Other prominent professors agree that women are not reaching the highest positions, and research shows that, unfortunately, a gender pay gap still exists in medicine.

"Medicine is not a profession of gender equality," says Anita Holdcroft, Emeritus Professor of [anaesthesia](#) at Imperial College. "Research shows women often feel uncomfortable in negotiations over pay. But yet they are doing the work. And the percentage of women who apply for clinical excellence awards is less than men." She suggests we need to think about how to overcome some of these gender barriers and enable women to "become visible."

So, why are men becoming an endangered species in medicine?

Will Coppola, a senior lecturer at University College London, believes the problem starts at secondary school. "There is a serious problem with underachievement of boys at school," he says, and

he suggests that medicine is becoming a less attractive career option for men for reasons such as loss of status, regulation and control, and decreased autonomy.

But is a female future bad practice, asks Khan?

Despite the fears propagated by the media, more women in the medical profession could lead to safer practice, she writes. A review of complaints received by the National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS) shows women are less likely to be subject to disciplinary hearings.

And she adds that findings published in a report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlight the progress of women in medicine. "With the report saying it will take women 55 years to reach equal status with men in the senior judiciary and 73 years for [women](#) directors in FTSE 100 companies, it seems in terms of numbers, female doctors have made giant leaps for womankind," she concludes.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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