Sexism in Surgery - Mad Men Meets Healthcare

And the Management of Midlife



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WPSMS The Working Party on Sexual Misconduct in Surgery

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Addressing Sexual Misconduct in Healthcare



AN INDEPENDENT REPORT ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BY COLLEAGUES IN THE SURGICAL WORKFORCE

Breaking the Silence

Spent a fascinating couple of days this week at a Women in Medicine conference. I had no idea! It was an eye-opening saga of everyday sexism that would shock most people in the corporate world. And what's so sobering about it, is that the mysogyny seems to be aimed about equally at medical staff - and patients.

WIMIN, the conference, is in its third year. It was created by two doctors, Kate Stannard and Helen Burdett as a side hustle to their already crazy lives. They were tired of the highly siloed, boring medical conferences they were used to, and wanted to create an entirely different culture - one of openness, and connecting dots across disciplines and stages of care. It also wanted to stem the retention issues of women in the field.

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WIMIN was sold out and bursting the seams of the Spa Hotel in Tunbridge Wells. (Note the dates for next year's Sept 12-13 at the University of Cambridge). I met a ton of impressive change agents working on health and women's health, and promise to get many of them onto the podcast so you can hear what they shared. They included Dr. Nighat Arif, author of <u>The Knowledge</u>. Dr. Louise Newson, a leading UK menopause expert, Professor Cari Newlands who prepared the report described below, and the two doctors, Dr. Becky Cox and Chelcie Jewitt, who are behind the site <u>Surviving in Scrubs</u>, aimed at calling out sexism and harassment in health care.

I was going to give a keynote about longevity, 4-Quarter Lives and the opportunities of Q3 for women and careers. But the recent headlinegrabbing report on <u>sexism in surgery</u> entitled **Breaking the Silence: Addressing Sexual Misconduct in Surgery**, had made my other expertise pillar of gender balance - and how to get the issue on the strategic leadership agenda - suddenly a much higher priority.

This report smacks of both Mad Men and Harvey Weinstein. Powerful men in control of their environments and wielding power over lots of young women who need them to progress their careers. Full of harassment, bullying and even rape. Between doctors! I'll be writing more about this more in the coming days, but take a glance through. It's sobering stuff.



Media coverage of the Breaking the Silence Report

A letter to The Times from a retired doctor, Dr Peter Hilton, says it all about the culture in these rooms we never go into willingly. He confidently and condescendingly reminds young women to get over themselves:

"Sexually inappropriate comments and actions do occur. It is stressful. All I can say is that if they want to make a success of this rewarding career then they should toughen up."

That perfectly illustrates the problem of the power-wielding, transactional power system in place in more places than I had ever imagined still existed in 2023 UK medical circles.

| necession of the second of the | in the chanced or substant pension surpluses in defined benefit pension NHS sexual assault Sir, Further to your report "I in 3 female surgeons assaulted by a colleague" (Sep 12), these incidents are not limited to surgery and occur through out all medical specialties. For years our organisation has highlighted the mistreatment of women in medicine, from misogyny and sexual discrimination to sexual assault. We are tired of being told "there is no problem" and "robust reporting systems are in place"— this is untrue. This steadfast denial makes change very difficult and contributes to the high attrition rate in women in hospital medicine. We would welcome a collaborative response to this survey it should be from the top down, so we would welcome Amanda Pritchard's involvement as NHS chief executive. | hon pra lon | must be implemented profession and the NHS will both be diminished. Jane McCue FRCS Ret'd consultant Surgeon, Hertford Sir, This "snowflake generation" of young doctors, largely female and selected on mainly academic excellence, clearly did not do their homework. Medical training and practice is brutal and demanding, with long hours, and bullying happens. Sexually inappropriate comments and actions do occur. It is stressful. All I can say is that if they want to make a success of this rewarding career then they should toughen up. Perhaps four A*s at A-level are not the answer to all the problems they will face. Dr Peter Hilton | corebratesic lericit |
|---|--|-------------------|--|----------------------|
| NT S OST | would welcome Amanda Pritchards involvement as NHS chief executive. Dr Kate Stannard Co-founder, Women In Medicine International Network | | | |
| 1000 | Sir, When I entered postgraduate | th | fumily the only home On land | : |

Letters to The Times reacting to the report

Somewhat reassuringly, a group of 50 doctors and colleagues got together to write <u>a rebuttal</u>. A bit waffly in my mind, quibbling with some of his points, rather than with the searing sexism permeating his statement, but nonetheless. Hopefully, a teachable moment. Sounds like there is a lot of work to do in this sector. Watch this space.

