

**Office of Research on
Women's Health**

Office of the Director

National Institutes of Health

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ORWH Progress

At the meeting the participants acknowledged and praised:

- The commitment and strategic approaches of ORWH during the past 13 years, especially:
 - The wide reach for collaboration with other agencies, institutions, and organizations
 - The life-span research agenda developed with input from the research community and the public
 - The multidisciplinary approach to research
 - The concept that sex/gender-based research benefits men as well as women.

ORWH Progress (cont.)

- Disease-specific areas in which research on women's health has advanced
- The contribution this research is making to evidence-based practice of medicine
- Programs that have stimulated the recruitment and retention of women in biomedical careers

Broad Research Issues for the Future

- It is time to translate the new science into a system of clinical best practices for gender-based medicine and to test its outcomes on morbidity and longevity.
- Distinguish between the effects of biological sex and those of society and behavior.
- Develop new research and treatment protocols that take into account the stages of human development.
- Expand the multidisciplinary approach to even more fields, such as engineering, physics, and the behavioral and social sciences.

➤ **Broad Research Issues for the Future (cont.)**

- Develop an understanding of translational research.
- Consider public/private research collaboration.
- Set a balance of basic science, clinical science, community research.
- Study co-occurring disorders.
- **Encourage animal investigations of sex differences—currently female animals are not required in animal research.**

Broad Research Issues for the Future (cont.)

- Support model building, in addition to hypothesis testing.
- Study how to get more women and minority women to participate in clinical trials; analyze the body of knowledge available.
- Consider how research efforts relate to international research and treatment programs.
- Partner with international research efforts to study diabetes, depression, arthritis.
- Distribute spending in such a way that more diseases receive support, or channel spending where there is the greatest potential for payoff.

Specific Areas/Topics for Research

- The influence of the sex chromosomes on molecular biology.
- Sex-specific responses to environmental conditions.
- Occupational influences on the health of women
- The genesis of the sex-specific prevalence of some diseases.
- The impact of the hormonal changes in the aging person.
- Preterm birth: what causes pregnancy to terminate

Specific Areas/Topics for Research (cont.)

- The mechanisms of pregnancy and why women stay pregnant
- Age differences in responses to hormones
- Remedies for the symptoms of menopause
- Analysis of the data from WHI by population groups
- Obesity; life elements that cause women to overeat
- Health of women prisoners

Specific Areas/Topics for Research (cont.)

- Dental health and diseases
- Immune-mediated inflammatory cascade and how it is influenced by the culture and the products women use
- Bone health and osteoporosis
- Sex differences in pain and pain relief
- The function of sex hormones in the immune, nervous, cardiovascular systems

Specific Areas/Topics for Research (cont.)

- The nervous systems of the brain, gut, and immune system
- Implications of stem cell research for immune systems
- Depression and its co-morbidity with many other diseases

Career Issues for the Future

➤ Understand the academic environment and the threat to young researchers:

The costs of medical school and liability insurance are high and rising and many young people who begin in research do not continue, especially women and minorities.

➤ Training for women and minorities is needed in practical matters:

how to negotiate a contract, what to ask for, how to arrange work to life style needs, how to be pregnant and not jeopardize advancement.

Career Issues for the Future (cont.)

- **Mentors of all levels and both sexes are needed for young people.**
- Complacency and insensitivity to women's career issues are beginning to characterize some younger women; this should be counteracted.
- **Unconscious gender-based assumptions and stereotypes are deeply embedded in the patterns of thinking of both men and women.** Therefore, women and work performed by women consistently receive lower evaluations than men and work performed by men (by both men and women evaluators). The effect has impeded progress toward academic leadership by women.

Strategic Issues/Challenges for the Future

- Ensure that the ORWH and its programs continue and not experience reduced funding:
 - People on the Hill think the job is done; they ask: Didn't we already double the NIH budget?
 - Advocates need to be vigilant and active in appealing for funding of ORWH at sufficient levels.
 - Enhance partnerships, especially with professional societies
 - Build a resource of researchers at the grassroots level

Strategic Issues/Challenges for the Future (cont.)

- **Continued success depends on showing relevance:**
 - Highlight practical benefits, such as practice guidelines
 - Translate results into policy
 - Increase educational outreach on how research works, and the value of research
- Pay attention to the changing climate on the Hill and changes at NIH and to the broad issues in the country, and how those will affect funding for women's health.

Strategic Issues/Challenges for the Future (cont.)

- **Make women's health relevant to men's health.**
- Foster a synergy with men.
- Get more women and minorities on study groups and other decision-making processes.
- Pay attention to language use—for example, does speaking of minorities and women define two separate groups that do not cross over. Is culturally sensitive language being used in recruitment efforts for clinical trials?