

Case Study: Bridging the Gender Gap

The radiology department at Vanderbilt University Medical Center is gaining expanded funding and national recognition as a model for improving gender equity in the specialty.

By Linda Sowers

Key Takeaways:

- After publishing the findings of its women's faculty development program, leaders of the Women in Radiology initiative realized it could serve as a model for the radiology specialty.
- Partnering with the ACR Tennessee Radiological Society, the Vanderbilt team is convening a state-wide educational and networking event for women and underrepresented minority radiology trainees.
- The Women in Radiology effort has also gained recognition and support nationally. The AMA awarded a grant to support research advancing the study of women in the medical profession.

Over the last decade, radiology has struggled to recruit, retain, and advance women. In 2017, while men and women graduated from medical school at a nearly equal rate, only 27 percent of women graduates became radiology residents¹. The gap in gender diversity widens throughout the spectrum of women in radiology practice and leadership. Out of every 100 radiologists, only about 21 are women, and only 13 out of every 100 radiology leaders are women.²

At Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC), the radiology department has set out to change this trajectory with its Women in Radiology initiative. In 2014, Lucy B. Spalluto, MD, associate director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Stephanie E. Spottswood, MD, MSPH, professor of radiology and chief of pediatric nuclear medicine, co-founded the initiative to develop knowledgeable, successful, confident women prepared to achieve career success and assume leadership positions. (Read more about the results of Women in Radiology in the [Breaking Down Barriers](#) case study.)

Launched in 2014, the initiative offers numerous opportunities for professional development and mentorship, along with tools and support for women faculty, staff, and trainees. As part of the Women in Radiology effort, Spalluto and Spottswood developed a two-year educational program called the Leadership Intervention to Further the Training of Female Faculty (LIFT-OFF). After publishing the results of the program in national radiology journals, including *JACR*[®] and *Academic Radiology*, the team began getting calls from other institutions looking for advice on how to build their own programs.

Answering the Call

As Spalluto engaged with her colleagues across the country, she realized that Vanderbilt's program could help the greater radiologic community by serving as a model for improving gender equity in the specialty. "We began to recognize that this was an opportunity to build something novel, which we could share with other institutions around the country," she says. "Equally important, we realized this program was a true research project that could provide an avenue for funding to support and expand our efforts."



The Women in Radiology initiative, co-founded by Lucy B. Spalluto, MD, sponsored a two-year educational program called the Leadership Intervention to Further the Training of Female Faculty (LIFT-OFF).

With that realization in mind, Spalluto began exploring local, regional, and national funding mechanisms. At the local level, the Women in Radiology initiative received support via a seed grant from the Vanderbilt University Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. And it now receives ongoing funding through the radiology department's Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Regionally, the Women in Radiology leaders also partnered with the ACR Tennessee Radiological Society (TRS). "Our ACR state chapter has been extremely supportive and recognizes the importance of promoting diversity and inclusion," says Spalluto. In 2016, TRS formed and funded a Committee for Women and Diversity, with Spalluto as its chair. The TRS recently awarded its initial grant to jointly sponsor a first-ever Diversity Networking Event with Vanderbilt's Women in Radiology group.

"Through this event, we aim to increase networking opportunities for underrepresented minority and women radiology trainees in Tennessee and to also provide them with career development opportunities," says James A. Martin, MD, president of TRS. "Historically,

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The ACR Tennessee Radiological Society, led by president James A. Martin, MD, partnered with Vanderbilt's Women in Radiology group to sponsor a first-ever Diversity Networking Event.

women have gravitated toward other specialties. Vanderbilt has made diversity and inclusion intentional, and they've achieved great results. Now we're trying to expand that success out to involve the state of Tennessee and more."

F. Gregory Curtin MD, past president of TRS, agrees. "As far as the specialty goes, we need to get more women involved in radiology. And we need more women members in our chapter. This type of programming helps drive us into the future," he says.

At the national level, Spalluto uncovered and applied for a grant with the American Medical Association (AMA): [the Joan F. Giambalvo Fund for the Advancement of Women](#). This is a grant funding mechanism that supports research advancing the study of women in the medical profession. The award came with more than just funds to build the program. "I was invited to attend the AMA's national meeting to talk about our Women in Radiology initiative and to meet grantees in different specialties and hear about their efforts to advance women in medicine. We were able to share our ideas and network with other innovators. It was gratifying to realize that, with all of us working together, it's possible to make a difference nationally."

Making a Difference Together

Spalluto believes that by broadening the focus of efforts like Women in Radiology, the specialty can begin to narrow the gender gap. Toward that end, she cites the work of two national organizations (both of which she is a member of) that are spearheading the drive to advance diversity and address the needs of women and other minorities in radiology.

The American Association for Women Radiologists (AAWR) is a nationally recognized society that sponsors a number of programs to promote opportunities for women and provides mentorship opportunities for the next generation of women radiologists. (Learn more about AAWR in this [JACR article](#).) In addition, Spalluto joined the [ACR Commission for Women and Diversity](#), which increases the awareness and recognition of the value of diversity and improves professional opportunities for women and minorities in radiology.

Both AAWR and ACR recognize that diversity and inclusion are critical to the future success of radiology and make dedicated efforts at the national level to advance programs and policies that address the needs of women and other minorities in radiology.

As a rallying cry for the radiology specialty, Spottswood cites a well-known proverb to highlight the impact that all of these initiatives together can have on advancing women in radiology: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Next steps:

- To launch your own effort to support women in radiology, look to thought leaders like the radiology department at VUMC.
- Connect with national organizations like AAWR and groups like the ACR Commission for Women and Diversity for access to information, resources, and support.
- Consider outside sources of funding for your women in radiology initiative, such as your state ACR chapter and national grantors like the AMA.

ENDNOTES

1. Association of American Medical Colleges. [FACTS: Applicants, Matriculants, Enrollment, Graduates, MD/PhD, and Residency Applicants Data - Data and Analysis - AAMC](#).
2. RadioGraphics. Spalluto L, Arleo EK, et al. [Addressing Needs of Women Radiologists: Opportunities for Practice Leaders to Facilitate Change](#); *RadioGraphics*, Vol. 38, Issue 6, Oct. 2018.

Share Your Story

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