

# Women in Medicine: How to Bring Women Physicians into Roles of Influence and Leadership

This four-part series builds on the insights delivered in *Women in Medicine: Setting the Agenda for Change*, a collaboration between Korn Ferry and the American Medical Women's Association, and focuses on the roles of medicine, healthcare organizations, leaders, and physicians in helping women achieve fulfillment and success in their medical careers.

Women physicians will move into leadership roles in clinical care, education, research, management, and policy, and more women can advance with support from stakeholders across the continuum of medicine and healthcare. This article offers collaboration strategies and tactics for medicine, healthcare management, and women physicians to advocate for the inclusion, engagement, development, and promotion of emerging women physician leaders. The following are recommendations and actions steps.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF WOMEN PHYSICIANS

**Alignment is everything.** Ensure that recruitment, hiring, and leadership development initiatives mesh with the organization's mission, vision, values, strategic imperatives, and financial, operational, and clinical goals and objectives.

**Perform a gap analysis.** Define physician leadership needs and gaps within units, departments, divisions, facilities, and systems.

- Forecast upcoming leadership gaps generated through turnover or planned retirements, including missing pieces of knowledge, skill, experience, and leadership style.
- Evaluate long-term strategic goals like growth, expansion, service development, health equity, and sustainability to ensure you have the most qualified leaders to address these priorities.
- Analyze leadership needs, including identifying critically important leadership traits like resilience, empathy, transparency, flexibility, agility, integrity, and courage.

**Evaluate, then act.** Assess existing women physician leadership initiatives before planning and implementing new programs or program upgrades.

- Make sure physician leadership development programs incorporate needs analyses, required skills and competencies, assessments, feedback mechanisms, and actionable insights from data.
- Evaluate physician leadership development programs for integration with clinical and business strategies, goals, and culture.
- Analyze how physician leadership development programs measure up on price, time commitment, expected return of investment (ROI), and clinical and business impact.

"The best women physician leaders focus on developing others while encouraging strategic thinking, innovation, and action," says Eliza Lo Chin, MD, MPH, Executive Director, AMWA. "Their integrity, resilience, and humility inspire colleagues to do things they never thought possible."

**Present diverse development options.** Tap external and internal sponsors who could influence the trajectory of women physicians' careers.

- Offer mentoring to help navigate business and clinical challenges and build a satisfying career pathway.
- Offer group experiences where women physicians come together to collaborate and work on projects and assignments.
- Prioritize development, not training.** Place women physicians within environments that allow them to learn and grow as people and professionals.
- Introduce collaborations with colleagues from other departments through job rotations, job shadowing, leadership of special projects, lunch-and-learn sessions on leadership, and book discussions on careers and work-life balance.
- Provide women physicians with ongoing feedback and coaching—especially from veteran physicians and executives who can serve as role models and mentors.

"Leadership development offers women physicians new ways of thinking," says Liz Bickley, COO, Korn Ferry Health. "They're better positioned to improve productivity, engage internal and external stakeholders, and build a high-performing work culture."

**Measure program results.** Determine how you'll measure women physician leadership development success via measures like participation, subsequent promotions, increases in leadership responsibilities, or peer reviews of individual and group success. Also, evaluate how well leadership development programs help women physicians work more effectively in current positions and roles.

• Encourage women physicians to stretch their knowledge, skill, experience, and talent by taking on projects that expand their job description and scope of work. They'll have the opportunity to cross boundaries, work outside of comfort zones, and think creatively about change and innovation.

**Invest in soft skills.** Physician leadership calls for applying soft skills that go beyond technical and clinical training. Offer women physicians education, training, and coaching opportunities in strategic thinking and planning, conflict resolution, decision making, negotiating, performance planning and appraisal, and problem-solving, along with communication skills like empathy, listening, and feedback.

**Facilitate networks.** Support women physicians in

building and sustaining networks—both inside and outside the organization.

**Embrace a growth mindset.** Give women physicians enough leeway to experiment and make errors as they transition into leadership roles.

**Recognize and reward.** Reward and recognize women physicians for small and large achievements in new and emerging leadership roles.

**Invest in career paths.** Highlight career paths across clinical, operational, and financial roles, making sure women physicians understand available career paths and the knowledge, outcomes, and experience required for promotion to leadership roles.

**Ask about aspirations.** Develop mechanisms for checking in with women physicians about leadership targets and career aspirations. Where do they see themselves—professionally and personally—in one year, five years, and ten years?

**Invest in face time.** Set up opportunities for women physicians to interact with established physician and executive leaders. Encourage your current leadership team to maintain an open-door policy, making themselves available to veteran and emerging women physician leaders. Give women physicians time and space to ask questions about career growth and what it will take to move into leadership.

**Plan for succession.** Invest in who's best for what's next. The succession planning process will offer input on women physicians who could take on leadership roles if and when they become available.

**Link succession to development.** Integrate succession plans with the professional development programs offered to physicians.

## CONCLUSION

Read more about the Korn Ferry-AMWA report, *Women in Medicine: Setting the Agenda for Change*.

[bit.ly/amwakfreport](http://bit.ly/amwakfreport)

## RESOURCES

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## About AMWA

The American Medical Women's Association is a multi-specialty organization of women physicians committed to advancing women in medicine, advocating for equity, and ensuring excellence in health care.

## About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.

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