

## **Linda Bordsky MD Essay Award Submission 2026**

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**Medical School:** University of South Alabama College of Medicine

**Year in School:** M1 (Class of 2029)

**First Membership Year:** 2026



**Bio:** Grace Turner is a current first-year medical student at the University of South Alabama's Fredrick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, Grace graduated cum laude from Wellesley College in Massachusetts with a Bachelor of Arts in English. Following graduation, Grace returned to Birmingham, where she worked as a clinical research coordinator for the University of Alabama at Birmingham's (UAB) Institute of Cancer Outcomes and Survivorship. There, she studied the effect of pediatric cancers and sickle cell disease on the brain and cognitive function. In her free time, Grace can always be found with a book and working on her stand-up comedy routine.

**Title:** The Neverending Dinner Party: The Longevity of Women in Medicine

“I remember when...” was a refrain that danced around the room from woman to woman as each member of the dinner party wistfully reminisced on times past. I sat in the dining room surrounded by women who were, by definition, strangers, yet we conversed as old friends. We had gathered together, all joined by our shared alma mater and professional intersection: Wellesley College and medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). While to some, a dinner with fellow alumni is a seemingly commonplace event, it felt like a unicorn for me—a rare convergence of many women, hundreds of miles away from my small Massachusetts college. Wellesley College, importantly, is one of the few Seven Sister Institutions that remains a women’s college. This provided me with an unmatched and unique undergraduate experience that few understand, thus making the alumni bond that much more magical.

The room itself was a living timeline and comprised a multitude of experiences and life stages. Our host, a pediatric surgery attending, welcomed us to the new home she had purchased with her partner. One guest had graduated from Wellesley in the 1970s and was one of the first female pediatricians in the city of Birmingham, now retired and enjoying her family. Another member of the group was a neurologist who graduated from Wellesley in the early 2000s and discussed the trials of parenting a 7-year-old boy. And yet another was a med-peds fellow who shared the progress of her wedding planning. The two youngest members of the group included me, a fresh Wellesley College graduate deep in the uncertainty of medical school applications and the growing pains of post-grad life. Our youngest member had just finished her sophomore year at Wellesley and was engaging in a summer research program at UAB, still in the deliciously sweet stage where college life is all you know.

Rather than as physicians, trainees, or applicants, we talked as friends, drunk on nostalgia, as we traded stories of our beloved alma mater and shared experiences of being a woman in medicine. As I looked around the room, grateful to be in the moment, I conjured up one word to describe this experience: *longevity*. Before me, I saw what it means to persist through all stages of life, medical training, and womanhood. To me, the concept of longevity as it relates to women in medicine speaks to the power of intergenerational collaboration among women, the necessity of keeping women in the physician profession, and the future of women in medicine. In essence, it should be a never-ending dinner party of learning from our past, understanding our present, and striving for a better future.

#### Part 1: Past

As a first-year medical student, I rely on the longevity and expertise of my professors and mentors. I am a sponge that eagerly attempts to absorb their years of experience in the minutes or hours of our interaction. What I have also learned from these experiences is that wisdom is not confined to hierarchy; rather, I have something to gain from individuals at every level of training. From second-year medical students to attendings, everyone can offer something valuable, not just medical knowledge, but also insights into life as a woman physician. Intergenerational collaboration between women in medicine is the key to a depth of information and perspective that cannot be replicated elsewhere. The never-ending dinner party should not be isolated to one night of gathering, but must be a mindset adopted by all levels of training and practiced by all women in medicine to be truly effective.

## Part 2: Present

Presently, we are experiencing what has been aptly coined “a leaky pipe” regarding the place of women in medicine<sup>1</sup>. A 2023 JAMA cohort study found that between 2014-2019, female physicians experienced an attrition rate of 38.3% as opposed to 32.4% for male physicians<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, a 2024 AMA figure reported that women physicians were more likely to suffer from burnout than their male counterparts, with 47.2% of women physicians saying they felt symptoms of burnout compared to the 38.9% of men<sup>3</sup>. These statistics, unfortunately, are unsurprising to many. What is surprising, however, is that the pipeline’s entrance is not the problem. The AAMC reports that women have made up the majority of medical school applicants and matriculants for the past six years. For the 2024 entering MD class, women made up 56.8% of all applicants and 55.1% of all matriculants<sup>4</sup>. These statistics make clear that the issue is not getting women into medicine, but keeping them there. Sometime during the dinner party of training and working, a back door opens that women feel compelled to exit from. Insufficient support within the healthcare system, compounded with institutional and societal gender inequalities, has made the exit door the only option for many women physicians.

## Part 3: Future

Reality then begs the question: What is the *longevity* of women in the medical profession? What would this Wellesley dinner look like in 40 years, when I’m the one scratching my mind for college memories that are now farther away? Through legacies like Dr. Linda Brodsky and the many women physicians that I have met along my journey in medicine so far, I choose to believe the never-ending dinner party is actualizable. Furthermore, as an aspiring pediatrician, I can’t help but hope that intergenerational collaboration is something I can

encourage and that I can add to the longevity of women in medicine. I hope to one day host my own dinner party where I can look back and say “I remember when” with a feeling of pride, not only for what women in medicine before me have endured, but for the strides that have been made. In the end, longevity is not measured in years, but in the continuity, community, and willingness of women to pull out a seat for others at the dinner table.

## References

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