Welcome to another edition of the Women in Surgery newsletter! Our research with the University of Exeter confirmed what so many of us have always felt – we all know how important role models are to current and future women surgeons. Being able to see other women who resemble ourselves and have ‘made it’ or are ‘making it’ helps us. It helps us to recognise, even in those tough, despondent times we all sometimes face, that it is possible to succeed in surgery, and to enjoy a fulfilling career and a life outside of the profession. This recognition can lift our spirits, encourage us and bring back that joy that makes us press forward. This joy is important whether you’re a medical student just starting out, or a senior surgeon at the peak of your professional development.

And here’s the thing: you are a role model. You inspire that joy in others, even if you’re doubting it as you read this. If you’re working in surgery, or declaring that that is your intention, you’re showing other people that it’s possible. So help show your colleagues and your juniors that surgery is accessible; women like you are surgeons, women like me are surgeons, women like us are surgeons.

This sentiment is the inspiration for our conference this year. The conference will be held on Friday 8 May and, for the first time ever, we’re holding it outside London, in Birmingham, so that we’re able to meet more of you who are spread across the country. It’ll be an opportunity to hear from lots of women like you; how they have managed their careers and their lives, and how you might approach different phases of your own career. If you’re relatively new to surgery, come along and meet some role models. And if you’ve been in surgery a while, join us to share your experiences and be that role model.

We held this year’s ‘senior women’s’ event (for consultants and senior SAS grades) at the Amanda Wakeley flagship store in London’s Mayfair, and what a fabulous day it was! We considered the challenges we might face once we’ve finished training (including challenges outside of the professional) and how we could address these. We hope to keep on running these events so that the women who are such great role models to students and trainees are able to think about their own careers and needs in a constructive and confidential environment.

But of course, we also want to support and encourage medical students and trainees of all levels, so whatever your grade, we hope to see you on 8 May in Birmingham!

If you can’t join us at the conference, you can still ‘meet’ other women like you via our directory (http://surgicalcareers.rcseng.ac.uk/wins/directory). The directory is open to all WinS members and allows you to search for other WinS members by their location, grade or interest; a perfect way to make contact with surgeons who can advise you and inspire you!

If you would like to get in touch, we’d love to hear from you – email women@rcseng.ac.uk or call Clare on 0207 869 6212.
The second WinS senior women’s event proved to be as surprising and enjoyable as the first. A very different event yet unmissable. Walking past Fortnum and Mason on a lovely sunny Friday felt at odds with a meeting of serious senior women in surgery. Even stranger was turning into a designer clothing store which normally chills me to the bone despite being a confident professional. The Amanda Wakeley Flagship store in Mayfair proved to be a more than suitable venue for the event. As the granddaughter of a past president of the Royal College of Surgeons and the daughter of a surgeon, Amanda had built her own fashion empire in her own inimitable style.

The event was split into three sections interspersed with opportunities to network with colleagues from wide and varied backgrounds.

The first section was extremely thought provoking and dealt with important issues I have never come across discussed in medical conferences. Highly relevant issues that lend themselves to a more universal audience.

Some speakers spoke of their success in their chosen careers. This was not in the superhuman way that women are meant to accomplish and be accomplished at everything they try to do. Rather they were real stories by real women who stumbled and rose again to attain success in a highly fulfilling career. In addition, we also heard how personal issues were tackled with courage, dignity and real human compassion. The real Ya Ya sisterhood!

Also in this first section was a warm, compassionate yet humorous presentation which discussed the serious topic of predictive factors for marital breakdown, maintaining relationships and what to do when going through a divorce. A talk that brought home how susceptible we are to becoming a growing statistic without careful thought and management of one our most important relationships.

A well known clinical psychologist gave a simple message to us highly driven surgical women – you don’t need to have it all and do it all to be good enough. The consequences of our driven determination has huge psychic impact on us, those around us and especially our daughters! We are their role models after all. The statistics of rising anxiety disorders among our young women desperate to be perfect career women, wives, mothers and to excel in everything they turn their hand to struck a chord with nearly every delegate.
there. We need to be kind to ourselves and each other. Why do we need a clinical psychologist to tell us this I wonder?

The second session came from a team who explained the process associated with the Invited Review Mechanism. A fascinating insight into the very difficult work done by the team on behalf of the Royal College of Surgeons. A broad remit of looking after patients potentially affected and the sometimes very vulnerable clinicians is a very delicate balance. This was followed by searching discussions and some uncomfortable questions being raised.

The final session was definitely light relief but equally thought provoking. A Public Relations consultant mapping out the tricky world of online social media certainly led to a few ‘Oops’ moments. Finally a well-known female radio journalist giving advice on how to speak well in the media. With the BBC encouraging more women experts to talk on various topics in the press – this advice was bound to be a useful tool in the female surgeon’s armamentarium.

I am looking forward to the next event as I am sure it will educate, delight and surprise again.
A Flexible Mindset

Aliza Kheraj

that followed in the form of my cerebellar haemangioblastoma, detected late and incompatible with life.

Life shifted in a matter of moments and I went from operating on patients one day, to lying in a hospital bed awaiting a craniotomy the next. Postoperatively, I was bed-bound and overwhelmed by left-sided hypersensitivity and intense pain. Brainstem effects resulted in physical symptoms interpreting everything around me as dangerous. Shooting pains were produced by tiny movements of anyone standing on the left-side of me and light touch was intolerable. Knowing that none of these stimuli could possibly be causing actual damage, I decided to re-train my brain. I began with small tasks, washing the right side of my face first, followed by the left and continuing in the same fashion. In time, I requested that my blood pressure be taken on my left arm as a means of desensitisation. Over the next few weeks, I was mostly dependent on others for all of my basic needs. It was a startling journey into a world where I had very little control. I quickly learnt that a single-minded approach was not going to help me when my body was not equipped to obey my commands. It was essential to learn how to accept help in order to reach my goals. By adapting, I was able to invent creative solutions to everyday problems such as feeding myself or beginning to walk. This enabled both mental and physical adjustments to the new boundaries, which were moving daily. For the first time in my life, I had discovered that flexibility was my greatest strength.

A chance meeting with Prof Vishy Mahadevan, in a corridor at the RCS, inspired me to write this article. He shared with me the contents of his address to the newly welcomed diplomates of the College in July 2013 upon receipt of his Wood-Jones medal. Our esteemed Professor of Anatomy had urged the new members of the College to reflect upon the attributes that would equip them for a career in surgery. Interestingly, he highlighted flexibility as a quality that should be cultivated in times of strength, so that this capacity may be drawn from when needed.

I always thought being single-minded was the most important ingredient for success in surgery. Focused on jumping the next hurdle on the track – the aim was to obtain membership of the College and then, of course, the elusive Higher Surgical Training number. Career interruptions over a lifetime are to be expected, but I had never anticipated that they would come so soon for me. At the end of my first registrar year, I took leave from training to care for my mother during the last months of her life. Returning to surgical training shortly after her passing, I was unprepared for the rude awakening I went from operating on patients one day, to lying in a hospital bed awaiting a craniotomy the next.
Inspiring the Future is a free, online programme that helps to link up young people with inspiring role models through their state schools and colleges. We have also launched Inspiring Women with Miriam Gonzalez, the international lawyer and wife of the Deputy Prime Minister. At a glittering event in Lancaster House in London, over 100 girls from schools across London met Inspiring Women from a range of careers. They did a ‘speed mentoring’ session, where the girls could ask questions and hear about these different inspiring careers.

We have amazing women signing up from all professions and levels – from interns and apprentices to CEOs and directors – but we need a much better representation of women volunteers from the medical professions, and we are particularly keen to hear from women surgeons.

So Inspiring the Future is looking for women in surgery who can be role models to girls – these role models offer just one hour of their time a year to talk in a local state school. This could be talking to a small group or giving a talk in an assembly; you choose the event that suits you, on a day that suits your schedule.

It is all run through a secure online portal where you sign up to offer one hour and then you are invited in by schools in your area – and it’s free to all parties. Anyone can volunteer at any age, from trainee medics on their first rotation to women who have been surgeons for twenty years.

75% of women in work in the UK are in the 5 ‘C’s of employment (cleaning, caring, catering, cashiering or clerical); we are hoping to broaden horizons and raise aspirations, helping girls to think about other options that are open to them. With less than 10% of consultant surgeons who are women, visibility of those who are is vital if we are to help girls envision themselves as surgeons in the future.

For details, please visit https://itfinspiringwomen.wordpress.com/2013/12/13/why-volunteer-with-inspiring-women/ or sign up and offer just one hour of your time (https://inspiringthefuture.secure.force.com/ITFSiteRegister?Independant). You simply sign up, fill in a profile with a small amount of information about your job and then schools can invite you in. Please contact carol.glover@educationandemployers.org with any questions.

And please do let us know you heard about it from Women in Surgery by writing ‘Women in Surgery’ in the ‘campaigns’ box when you fill in your profile.

We aim to have 15,000 women volunteering, reaching 250,000 girls across the country, in 2015 – we would be delighted if women in surgery could be involved.
Motivating individuals to work towards group goals.

This was certainly cultivated throughout the day as a number of women surgeons shared their own experiences in speeches and panel discussions. Karen Nugent considered the role of personality in leadership; understanding who you are and the effect that you have on others, and encouraged us to grasp (or create) opportunities. Katie Cross led us in feeding back our own experiences of ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly’ in leadership, and many delegates shared strategies and suggestions that they have found helpful.

The first of our key-note speakers of the day was Clare Smyth MBE, the only female three...
Michelin-starred chef in Britain, speaking on ‘Heroes and Role Models’. There were nods and smiles of identification as Clare shared the challenges of working long, hard hours in a traditionally male environment, and the necessity of self discipline to repetitively practise skills (such as repeatedly filleting fish!) in order to become good at them. Despite her many accolades, Clare reasons that if your eyes are open to it, you are always learning.

As one of the two male speakers of the day, Nick Madden provided an entertaining and personable talk on ‘Behind every woman...’, reflecting on the balance of work and family life that he and his wife, Su-Anna Boddy, have sought to cultivate. Su-Anna is a paediatric urologist who features on the Eleanor Davies-Colley lecture theatre wall mural at the RCS in London, alongside many women who have been instrumental in the progression of Surgery and continue to inspire the leaders of tomorrow.

Delegates watched a screening of the excellent WinS International Women’s Day podcast (available at http://surgicalcareers.rcseng.ac.uk/wins), and the WinS National Poster Competition prizes were announced, with the winner giving a presentation on attrition rates in surgical training.

Miriam Gonzalez-Durantez (partner of the international law firm Dechart LLP) then gave her keynote speech entitled ‘Raising the Bar’. Miriam began by telling us that as a child in Spain she wanted to be a surgeon (albeit a surgeon saving the day in high heels with no paperwork!), and has great admiration for the profession. However Miriam shared that she did not know any female surgeons when she was growing up, and is saddened that even now, entering ‘women surgeons’ into Google brings up results mainly advertising cosmetic surgery. She explained her passion for fighting stereotypes and promoting female role models for girls to relate to in everyday life – including hospitals – not just on TV or in glossy magazines. Miriam is encouraging participation in the Inspiring Women campaign, a programme aiming to see 15,000 women from a wide range of occupations going into schools to talk with girls and simply share their story. This helps to empower girls to pursue whatever paths they wish in future. Miriam’s views on the importance of the story each of us has to tell linked back to a comment Clare Marx had made earlier in the day, of how storytelling is a powerful agent for change. How will you share your story?

With these thoughts fresh in our minds, the day came to a close with a drinks reception in the Library. However, following such an inspirational day sharing with ‘Tomorrow’s Leaders’ and a female surgeon now President of the College, delegates were left with a sense of anticipation for what tomorrow will hold.
Wessex Orthopaedic Women (WOW)

Miss A Ardolino, Miss J Higgins – trauma and orthopaedic registrars, Wessex

Wessex is currently the region with the highest percentage of female trainees in trauma and orthopaedics in the country (over 25%). We recognised that we have the potential to trailblaze and face some of the issues encountered by women in surgical training. If nothing else, women think, learn and work in a slightly different way to men and at some point can be affected by having children and the effect that this has on life and career. WOW was developed as a way to network and forge relationships, with the ultimate aim of helping and supporting each other, sharing experiences, learning together and of course having some fun along the way.

We had our initial planning meeting in 2013 to identify what people wanted from the club and whether there was any interest. Our first social event was at a tapas restaurant in Winchester in November. Caroline Edwards, a paediatric orthopaedic consultant in Southampton, came to speak to us informally about her experiences throughout training and life as a newly appointed consultant and answer any questions. The evening proved a success, it was essentially a good girls' night out with some reassuring words and advice from someone who had been there before. We had an opportunity to discuss current training and education, childcare, social and plenty of other topics, as well as enjoy some excellent food and wine. Thank you to WinS for sponsoring the evening.

Our next event was speed dating in February 2014 for as many of the trainees in our region as possible, and also to spread the word of WOW to consultants. We asked 10 consultants with varied interests and expertise to come along, prepared to answer questions and chat with each of us for 5 mins in rotation. February is the perfect time for a speed dating theme with Valentine's day to set the scene, it was also close to our mock exam and National ST interviews so appealed to junior and more senior trainees to come and ask questions about any topics. We invited consultants with a research background, educational interest, Royal College and other National roles, examiners, as well as a good mix of specialties in order to broaden the potential for learning.

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We are very excited about WOW as our club, and hope that we inspire other regions to set up a similar group, enabling female surgeons to come together in support of each other and have fun along the way.

European Association of Endoscopic Surgery launches Women in Surgery Initiative

Dr. Elsa B. Valsdottir MD
Associate Professor University Hospital of Iceland Medical School

As more and more women enter the field of surgery, it is imperative for any surgical society that wishes to stay relevant to be an attractive option for them, in the era of fierce competition over surgeon's time and attention. The European Association of Endoscopic Surgery (EAES) has therefore decided to launch an initiative to increase participation of women surgeons within the society. This initiative is led by the Education and Training committee of the EAES. At first the effort will focus on reaching out to women surgeons who are already members of EAES, encouraging them to put their names forward as speakers and moderators at the annual congress; to work with the hosting country of the annual congress to recruit high quality women speakers and moderators from the local societies and to encourage women to apply for positions within the EAES committees. Secondly, the EAES hopes to recruit more women surgeon as members. Surgeons from the United Kingdom are already prominent within the EAES and we hope that members of WinS will find the society of interest, both professionally and socially.

http://www.eaes-eur.org/home.aspx
The Charity MyBigCareer is enlisting the help of successful doctors! We help young people overcome disadvantaged beginnings and achieve what they aspire to through one to one careers guidance, and the aspiring medics in the schools we support need assistance!

Founded in September 2013, MyBigCareer launched its pilot scheme in Hackney, East London, with encouraging results, but we don’t have the resources to properly assist pupils interested in pursuing careers in medicine. Many of these youngsters don’t have a family precedent set in regards applying to university or carving out a successful career in medicine or a related field, and so are at a loss as to how to follow their career aspirations through.

MyBigCareer need volunteers from the medical profession to kindly give up a small amount of their time in order to mentor some of these young people through the challenges of applying to medical school. This is likely to involve mock medical interviews and simply talking to students and giving them an idea of what participation in the medical arena truly involves.

Many of the students considering medicine are girls, and it would be fantastic for them to be able to speak to women who have forged successful careers in the field. Receiving the aid of somebody already established in the profession could make all the difference. Please refer to our website at www.mybigcareer.org for more information, and contact Kate at kate.maher@mybigcareer.org if you are interested in volunteering with the Charity.
Welcome to our new committee

The WinS committee is a group of surgeons and future surgeons recruited to guide and support the work of WinS. We meet twice a year with lots of work happening between meetings. Since our last newsletter, we have recruited many new members, and while it’s sad to say goodbye to the old friends who worked with us at WinS, we are really glad to welcome our new starters.

Current committee members are:

- Sabreena Mahroof – a consultant hand surgeon based in Birmingham, Sabreena has been on the WinS committee for two years.
- Eleanor Smith – A medical student at Imperial on the graduate entry programme, who’s always been interested in surgery, lived in America and the UK and is coxswain and captain of the Imperial College men’s rowing team.
- Jacqueline Waterman – A consultant T&O surgeon in west London, Jacqui is an enthusiastic member of WinS and the committee.
- Scarlett McNally (RCS Council) is also a member of the WinS directory.

In addition to these, the College flexible working advisor and representatives of ASIT and the MWF maintain helpful and active relationships with the committee. Scarlett McNally (RCS Council) is also a member of the committee and represents WinS at the College Council. If you’d like to contact the committee, please do! You can reach us either via Clare in the office (women@rcseng.ac.uk, 0207 869 6212) or through the WinS directory.

Toni Ardolino – a T&O trainee in Wessex who is currently on maternity leave and has previously spent time out of programme working as Clinical Advisor to the Chief Medical Officer.

Liz Ball – A consultant breast surgeon in Ipswich since 2013, married to another surgeon and keen baker, cyclist and triathlete.

Laurie Baxter – An associate specialist ENT surgeon in North Devon, Laurie has been Chair of the WinS committee for two and a half years.

Hemali Chauhan – A CT1 trainee in Basildon, who is bringing her experiences as a junior trainee to the committee and to WinS

Emily Decker – A foundation trainee in London, who has always been interested in surgery and is interested in supporting women who also love surgery, and understands why some are put off.

Lizzy Elsey – Lizzy is a run-through trainee in general surgery, based in Nottingham. Lizzy has run many local WinS events which are always popular!

Alison Halliday – A consultant vascular surgeon in Oxford and professor of vascular surgery at Oxford, Alison has recently reinvigorated previous involvement with WinS (when it was still called WiST – Women in Surgical Training).