ARE THERE TOO FEW WOMEN PRESENTING AT EMERGENCY MEDICINE CONFERENCES?

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Background

“A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult.” — Melinda Gates

The medical workforce prides itself on a reasonably fair admixture of males and females across the breadth of all specialties. Despite this there is a perception that women are under-represented as speakers at important emergency medicine conferences.

To establish whether this suspicion is borne out, across conferences, and across borders, we aimed to examine recent major emergency medicine conferences to determine the ratio of female to male speakers and the gender ratio of time spent presenting.

Methods

We selected emergency medicine conferences associated with large national and international emergency medicine organisations.

We recorded the number of presentations, the gender of the presenter and the time that they were required to speak. For sessions with multiple speakers we divided the time equally amongst those presenting for that session. Sessions where the gender of the speaker could not be determined through local knowledge or Google search were not included.

We excluded oral poster presentations and industry sponsored sessions. Pre and post conference workshops were not included in the analysis.

We determined gender bias by the percentage of female presenters at each conference and by the percentage of stage time given to female presenters.

Results

Seven major EM conferences in the period 2014-15 were selected from North America, Australia, Asia and Europe (ACEP, AAEM, EuSEM, CEM, ICEM and ACEM).

We found 1933 presentations of which 554 (28.6%) were given by women.

We documented 35,123 minutes of presentations of which 12,129 (26.3%) were delivered by women.

Women’s presentations were on average 105 seconds shorter than male presentations (23 minutes vs. 21 min 15 seconds). All conferences showed a gender bias with the range of women speakers ranging from 22.5% (EuSEM) to 41% (ACEM).

Conclusion

Women are under-represented as presenters at EM conferences. On average a women speaker speaks for less time than a male speaker.

The gender bias at conferences may be a self-fulfilling barrier to new female presenters developing as teachers, researchers and presenters. The reasons for this inequity need to be explained and understood.