

Women in Neurosurgery NEWS



AANS/CNS Section on Women in Neurosurgery

Spring 2019

Editor: Alia Hdeib, MD



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Women in Neurosurgery (WINS) Community Spring 2019 Update

Alia Hdeib, MD

2019 brings exciting celebrations and accomplishments for WINS members and the WINS community. Former WINS president, Shelly Timmons, MD, PhD, FAANS, FACS, serves as president of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and is the first woman neurosurgeon to fill this role. We look forward to Dr. Timmons's 2019 AANS Annual Scientific Meeting presidential address in San Diego this April.

With a focus on global neurosurgery and the global WINS community, this newsletter features updates on the inaugural CNS International Women's Think Tank at the past CNS meeting, a spotlight on courses offered at the upcoming AANS meeting on global neurosurgery and led by WINS members as well as a feature interview with the fall 2018 VISA Award Winner from Spain.

WINS is also getting ready for the 2020 WINS Celebration, which will celebrate the 30th anniversary of WINS. Stay tuned for more announcements and events planned by WINS for the 2020 Celebration at both the CNS and AANS meetings.

Inaugural CNS International Women's Think Tank

Sarah Woodrow, MD, FAANS

Throughout the world, the number of women in neurosurgery remains disproportionately small. But, despite different languages, cultures and socioeconomic issues, there is no doubt that we face similar challenges. In October 2018, the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) sponsored a unique event: The International Women's Think Tank. Seventeen women from four continents gathered to discuss issues facing them and their colleagues as a first step to developing a more global community of surgeons who can help support, mentor and educate each other from near or far.



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Women's Think Tank



Dr. Sarah Woodrow

Many of the surgeons described common challenges as minorities in this field, including feelings of isolation, stress maintaining a work-life balance and the pressure to prove oneself, all while having to be the pioneers in their respective environments and build a foundation for future generations of female surgeons. The need to overcome prejudice by both patients and peers, evidence of unequal pay and limited promotion opportunities were additional concerns for members of the group.

Also explored during the meeting were ideas about how to advance women in neurosurgery. Universally it was agreed that there is a need for more mentors and role models – this is particularly true in countries where only one or two female neurosurgeons exist. In order to meet this need, women in neurosurgery need to become more visible in part by achieving positions of leadership. Attracting a bigger critical mass of women to enter neurosurgery, providing leadership training to those who want to advance and encouraging and promoting each other were identified as important parts of this process. Lastly, we exchanged ideas on how to enhance international collegiality among female neurosurgeons across the globe.

- Create a “This is Neurosurgery”-type campaign with social media, highlighting the diversity in individual neurosurgeons across the globe and feature women prominently in the campaign.
- Develop a global network of women (perhaps using a web-based messaging application) to facilitate group discussion regarding cases or important professional issues.
- Recognize the unique perspective that women bring to the specialty of neurosurgery and with it the need for more tailored leadership training that would embrace and capitalize on these strengths.

Due to the resounding success of this inaugural event, plans are already underway to reconvene the Think Tank at the 2019 CNS annual meeting in San Francisco. Our hope is with additional international attendance, in particular from our partner society for the meeting (the Japanese Congress of Neurological Surgeons), more progress will be made in developing a strong network of women for collaboration and formalizing some of the ideas currently under discussion.

2019 AANS
ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING

American Association of Neurological Surgeons

THE SCIENCE OF PRACTICE

APRIL 13-17, 2019 • SAN DIEGO

WINS Members Leading the Way in Global Neurosurgery

Sarah Woodrow, MD, FAANS

Have you ever considered becoming a volunteer neurosurgeon in a developing country? Data from all fields of medicine are reporting increasing interest in surgical volunteerism. In neurosurgery, The Foundation for International Education of Neurological Surgeons (FIENS) has existed for almost 50 years and remains a resource dedicated to partnering North American neurosurgeons with sites all over the world; the focus of this collaboration is on neurosurgical education and training. For many the prospect of undertaking this type of volunteerism is exciting and rewarding, but also intimidating to initiate. They do not know where to start. To help encourage neurosurgeons to get involved in global neurosurgery and prepare

them for this experience, WINS is excited to announce that two of its members – Gail Rosseau, MD, FAANS, and Isabelle Germano, MD, FAANS – have organized practical symposia at this year’s AANS Annual Scientific Meeting in San Diego. “Global Neurosurgery Practice” is the brainchild of Dr. Rosseau. The full-day course consists of a series of informative lectures by neurosurgeons with a wide range of experiences in global neurosurgery discussing the “do’s and don’ts” of volunteerism across the globe. In addition, the program features several hands-on sessions to help neurosurgeons of all backgrounds become familiar with surgical techniques commonly used in more resource-limited surgical environments. Neurosurgery Around

the World: Education and Other Opportunities is a half-day course designed by Dr. Germano to bring together prominent neurosurgeons from around the globe to highlight collaborative educational and research endeavors. If you have ever had the desire to use your skills and knowledge to collaborate with surgeons in other countries this is the perfect opportunity to explore that interest. Both surgeons have worked hard to develop exciting programs that have something for everyone, whether you are a newly-credentialed surgeon or a seasoned veteran. Sign up now – registration is almost full! See the 2019 AANS Annual Scientific Meeting website for details.



WINS Fall 2018 Reception and Interview with VISA Award Winner from Spain, Dr. Idoya Zazpe

Alia Hdeib, MD

Dr. Idoya Zazpe, Chair of the Neurosurgery Department at the Hospital of Navarre in Pamplona, Spain, was recipient of the fall 2018 WINS Greg Wilkins-Barrick VISA Award. She came to the CNS Meeting in Houston, Texas in October 2018 and spoke at the WINS reception on October 9th, giving a speech addressing the present situation in her country of Spain regarding women in neurosurgery, maternity, mentorship, and future directions. Here we include experts from her speech:

"All of us here today thank other women... I would like to take the chance to thank all the women that made it possible for me to be here today; thanks to the first pioneer women neurosurgeons whose efforts have made our work easier today; thanks to my colleagues and WINS members, and, specially, thanks to my mother. My mum is one of the thousands of anonymous women who have changed the world working hard to get a better education for their children. She never studied a degree and did not even know what a neurosurgeon was until I chose this specialty. Nevertheless, she has been the biggest inspiration in my life.

More than a century ago, my grandma's aunt and her aunt migrated on their own from a small village in the Pyrenees to California, searching for a better life. It was a big adventure for women at that time, much bigger than my adventure coming here this week, but I have also come to America looking for an opportunity, to be a better neurosurgeon, as well as a better person. During these past few days I have met a large number of outstanding neurosurgeons and awesome women who are truly committed with neurosurgery, and the role of women in this specialty. During the first WINS think tank session last Saturday I had the chance to listen to you, share my experiences with you and make friends. Under Dr. Jennifer Sweet's coordination, we created a network and planned future appointments,

including the First International Women Neurosurgeons Congress, which hopefully will be held next year and I hope to attend.

Upon my return home, I plan to conduct a survey about the situation of women neurosurgeons in my country, and to spread WINS values through the Spanish Neurosurgical Society and the EANS. I would like to encourage international collaboration and participation in open-door programs, both as hosts and guests.

You have made me feel at home. It has been a privilege and an honor to have shared my time here in Houston with all of you. I would like to conclude my presentation with the mantra we are all wearing around our wrists and will take home with us: "She believed she could, so she did" "

~ **Dr. Idoya Zazpe**, WINS Reception, CNS meeting, Oct 9, 2018, Marriot Marquis, Houston, Texas.

We had the opportunity to interview Dr. Zazpe, and asked her about her view on mentorship, leadership, the WINS VISA Award, her trip to the CNS meeting, and future directions for women neurosurgeons in Spain.

Q: How did mentorship affect your path to your current position?

A: In the broad sense of the word, my parents have been my first and best mentors in my life. They never studied a degree and did not even know what a neurosurgeon was until I chose this specialty but they worked very hard for my sister's and my education and gave a life example for us.

Neurosurgery is much more than an amount of knowledge and techniques; it is also an art, a discipline, and a way of life. That is why mentors are so important in our profession and a mirror where we frequently look at ourselves. In my

career, most of my mentors have been men (because there are very few women neurosurgeons in Spain who are older than me), and I feel very grateful to all of them for everything they have taught me. However, many times we - women - need to identify with a real female figure. In that sense, I have missed having a woman mentor as a reference. I am the first university graduate in my family, the first woman neurosurgeon in my hospital and one of the youngest heads of department in my country. During my career, I've frequently experienced a feeling of isolation not only in relation to technical skills, but also when it comes to balancing work and private life, and more recently, regarding my role as head of department. On the other hand, I have been very lucky to overcome some gender barriers in my career and it would not have been possible without other women's help: women pioneers who made it easier for us today and other colleagues and friends who encouraged me in this way.

Q: What makes a good mentor, mentee, leader?

A: The way of living the specialty or the way of integrating the specialty in every neurosurgeon's life will depend to a great extent on the character of each surgeon. However, in addition to this "genetic component", so to speak, there is also an important educational and environmental component. In this regard, the figure of the mentor is of utmost importance.

Neurosurgery, like other human skills, is learned by observation and imitation. Not only technical nuances are observed and imitated, but also human abilities or savoir faire, such as how the senior neurosurgeon relates to patients and their families, how he/she communicates information and bad news, how handles complications and manage stress and frustration These experiences have a great influence in the way the trainees will face their professional

careers and how they will conciliate their personal and professional life. I believe a neurosurgeon may have many teachers (from whom to learn specific techniques), but very few mentors (from whom one is really being influenced in the way of living the specialty). In this regard I have had a few male mentors and multiple teachers, very few of them women.

It is also my belief, a mentor is not imposed, but somehow is chosen. That is, a person can be assigned as a mentor but if there is no connection between the mentor and the mentee or a two-way relationship, there will be no real mentoring in that relationship. Each person in a certain way exercises the freedom who to follow and to what extent, whether the assigned mentor or not. We probably may be more prone to "imitate" the figure we regard the most as a model, the one more appealing or attractive to us or the one we identify more ourselves with. Hence the importance of the psychological connection and bidirectionality in the mentor-mentor relationship, which makes this relationship much more complex and unique in each case.

Regarding this psychological aspect, it is likely that women identify themselves more with other female mentors or might achieve a greater degree of comfort or connection with someone of their own gender. In any case, psychological aspects of mentoring are more relative to personality rather than gender itself, nevertheless gender is an important issue in personality as well.

The relations between the mentor and the mentee and the leader and the team have a lot in common. They should be based on mutual respect and trust. Both, mentor and mentee and leader and team member, should be able to value the other as a unique human being beyond his/her virtues and defects.

A good mentor is patient, cares about his/her mentee and is always available for helping. A good mentor truly

believes in the possibilities of the mentee, trust him/her and knows how to get the best out of him/her. A good mentor teaches not only technical skills, but also shares his/her own life experience in the specialty ...and is also someone the mentee can share his/her own feelings and fears with.

A good mentee is keen to learn at all times, works hard and don't miss the opportunities life brings him/her. A good mentee trusts his/her mentor and gets the best from him/her. A good mentee asks for help when needed, cares about his/her mentor and is always thankful to him/her.

A good leader does not impose, but is the one the team chooses to follow. A good leader takes into account the team opinions and preaches by example. A good leader trusts his/her team and is also trustworthy for his team. A good leader values the teamwork over individuality. A good leader knows the potential of each team member and promotes it, while being able to create good work atmosphere and foster good relations among team members.

Q: What are you most proud of?

A: I am most proud of all people I love and to deserve their love despite my defects and failures, specially my family and friends.

I am very proud of what I have achieved, but at the same time I feel responsible for those around me or directly dependent on me. In the end, what you feel most proud of is the people you have around you or have chosen to be by your side, especially if you feel you have made them happy.



Dr. Idoya Zazpe

Family means everything to me and I really believe family and education can change the world as it has really changed mine.

If I have overcome some gender barriers in my career it is because I have reached a good balance between work and private life, what it is not easy at all.

Childbearing and neurosurgery are both very demanding and time-consuming tasks in themselves, but they are not in any way incompatible. Family and work conciliation concerns both men and women, and the whole of society in general. Learning about equity since early childhood, while changing social paradigms make us all step forward to a better world. Both men and women should walk together as individuals and take on new roles in this process of change. My husband Charlie and I would not have achieved our family and professional goals without each other's support. He works as a doctor in the Emergency Department at my hospital and spends as much - or even more - time than me with our kids. He has enjoyed childbearing as much as me and we had shared parental leaves. The education we are giving our three children is much different than the one we received. My parents, like any others in their generation, didn't share home

duties and it was my Mum who took care of household while working as well. What our kids see at home now is both parents, Mum and Dad, working in the same way in and outside the home. That is a pattern they have probably internalized and will reproduce in the future. Anyway, there is not just one, but many creative options to do things in life, and every woman, man, family and community should find their own way.

Currently, there are three women and three men staff in my department, including myself.

I am very proud of my team and at the same time it means a big challenge to lead such a group of brilliant and promising neurosurgeons and hope I will live up to the expectations.

I also feel very proud of all patients and families who trust their lives or the ones they love in my hands and I try to help them the best I can.

Q: What impact did the WINS VISA award have for you? How was your trip to Houston and the CNS meeting?

A: At meetings, I was often asked by younger women colleagues how I manage to reach a work-life balance. During these talks I tried to be of help, but I thought I could and should do more. That is why I decided to apply for the WINS VISA award. Hopefully, in the near future social advances will make the existence of associations like WINS unnecessary. But until we reach that point, these social improvements will certainly not be achieved without the work of such associations. Being announced as winner of the 2018 WINS VISA award meant both pride and sacrifice to me. I was proud to have been awarded by a prestigious institution such as WINS, and I also had to make the sacrifice of leaving my family at home and use my vacation days to come to the Reception at the CNS Annual Meeting in Houston. Anyway the experience exceeded by far all my expectations and I would like to thank WINS once again for bringing me this tremendous opportunity.

Not only was the award an honor for me, but the experience of traveling to

the CNS Congress in Houston and meeting so many wonderful people and sharing experiences with them was by far the best. During the first WINS think tank session I had the chance to meet a group of awesome women neurosurgeons who were truly

committed within the specialty and we talked about future plans together. During the WINS Reception I did a lot of networking and felt very wrapped up by all of my WINS colleagues who made me feel at home. I take the advantage of this interview to express my deepest gratitude to all of them.

Above all, I realized that despite the differences of country or culture, women neurosurgeons have many issues in common that affect us in daily life as women and neurosurgeons, such as: work conciliation, working relations in a predominantly male specialty, difficulty in access to Residency Programs and/or certain positions of responsibility, lack of female reference figures and low visibility in committees and boards of different neurosurgery organizations.

Q: What changes do you foresee for women in neurosurgery in Spain in the near future?

A: In Spain gender roles have experienced a radical transformation in only one generation. These social advances have facilitated the incorporation of woman into the working market.

Spain is the European country with the highest number of women attending medical school nowadays: 70% of our medical students, 65% of residents, and 51% of fully-trained medical professionals in Spain are women. Nevertheless, Neurosurgery is still the third most masculine specialty in my country. Women neurosurgeons in Spain account for 30% of trained specialists and for 40% of residents. All neurosurgeons,



Dr. Zazpe and the neurosurgery team

regardless of their gender, must overcome several barriers during their training and professional career (admission to medical school, residency programs, professional development...). In Spain, admission to residency programs depends only on a candidate's grades in medical school and on a national public examination. Hospitals have no role in accepting or refusing candidates. That is how our health care system works; it is a public system, and as such, it should guarantee equity in access to both patients and professionals.

It is possible that in the near future women will achieve numerical equality in professional practice, which does not mean that we will achieve equality of weight within the specialty. That will probably require some more years.

Less than 5% of management positions in Neurosurgery are chaired by women. As far as I know, we are only 3 women heads of department among the 75 neurosurgery departments in Spain, and only 1 in 7 board officers of the Spanish Neurosurgery Society is a woman.

All this data raises the question of why the pyramid towards leadership does not maintain the same proportion of women as in the base. The role of women in neurosurgery will be determined by the advance in social roles between men and women and the development of work-life balance for both men and women. Parallel to greater gender equality in society, the relevance of women in our specialty will be greater.

WINS Spotlight on Regional Mentee

Alexandra Giantini Larsen

Alexandra Giantini Larsen, currently a fourth year medical student, has been involved with WINS and WINS projects for the past several years. Here, she recounts how mentorship has been an important force for her in her career development thus far.

I was born and raised in New York City. For elementary school, I was fortunate to attend a school that instilled a love for science and the unknown in me at a young age. I then attended Stuyvesant High School, a public co-ed math and science focused school, followed by Johns Hopkins University for college, where I majored in molecular and cellular biology. I am currently a fourth-year student at Harvard Medical School and have applied into neurosurgery for the 2019 match.

My interest in pursuing a career in neurosurgery began during high school. During my junior year, I volunteered at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and the personal suffering and narrative of the individuals I met deeply resonated with me. Motivated by this experience to

explore the medical field further, I spent two summers as a student observer with the Weill Cornell Brain and Spine Center under the mentorship of Philip Stieg, PhD, MD, FAANS. Dr. Stieg made a profound impact on my journey by making the idea of becoming a neurosurgeon something realistic and attainable.

While in college, I worked closely with Alfredo Quinones, MD, FAANS, first in his research laboratory and then on patient outreach and international endeavors. Through my years with Dr. Quinones, I learned how a career in neurosurgery represents one of deep human connection between the surgeon and patient. At Harvard Medical School, I have worked as a researcher under the guidance of E. Antonio Chiocca, MD, PhD, FAANS, and Wenya Linda Bi, MD, PhD, both of whom have been exceptional role models as physician-scientists.

Reflecting back, all of the close mentors I have had throughout my journey to neurosurgery have given me unwavering support.



Ms. Alexandra Giantini Larsen

While others outside of the field have questioned the decision to pursue neurosurgery, especially since I was directed on the path since the end of high school, my mentors never questioned my interest or dedication. As I have transitioned from different experiences and institutions throughout my education, my mentors in neurosurgery helped immensely by facilitating connections and relationships for me at the new institution. Through these mentors and experiences over the last ten years, I have learned that being a neurosurgeon is not simply a career, but a way of life filled with integrity, compassion and the central principle of service to others.

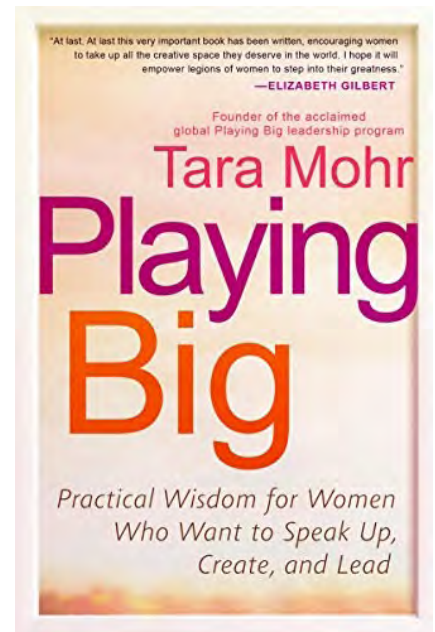
Book Corner

Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak Up, Create, and Lead by Tara Mohr

"There comes a time when we feel the call to play bigger."

~ Author Tara Mohr, an expert in women's leadership

This book gives steps and guides to help women develop skills needed to voice and pursue change they want to create and see at all levels, externally or internally.



Upcoming Events

Please join us for these upcoming WINS Sponsored Events and Events featuring WINS members

AANS Practical Course on Global Neurosurgery Practice

Dr. Gail Rosseau
Sunday, April 14, 2019

AANS Practical Course on Neurosurgery Around the World: Education and other Opportunities

Dr. Isabelle Germano
Sunday April 14, 2019

AANS/CNS Section on Women in Neurosurgery (WINS) Breakfast

Speakers – Maria Konnikova
Monday, April 15, 2019

AANS Louise Eisenheart Lecture

Maria Konnikova
Monday April 15, 2019

AANS Presidential Address

Dr. Shelly Timmons
Monday April 15, 2019

AANS Seminar on Mentorship: Lessons and Resiliency

Tuesday, April 16, 2019



WINS Speakers Bureau

Leadership/Mentorship

- Aviva Abosch
- Deborah L. Benzil
- Aruna Ganju
- Isabelle M. Germano
- Odette Harris
- Linda Liao
- Michelle Johnson
- Karin Murasko
- Susan Pannullo
- Ann M. Parr
- Julie Pilitsis
- Tanya Quinn
- Maryam Rahman
- Martina Stippler
- Ann Stroink
- Shelly Timmons
- Eve Tsai
- Roxane Todor
- Jamie S. Ullman
- Marjorie Wang
- Stacey Wolfe
- Edie Zusman

Research/Innovation

- Aviva Abosch
- Sepideh Amin-Hanjani
- Denise Crute
- Isabelle Germano
- Ann Parr
- Julie Pilitsis
- Shenandoah Robinson
- Uzma Samadani
- Jennifer Sweet
- Eve Tsai
- Edie Zusman

Education

- Ellen Air
- Judy Huang
- Sepideh Amin-Hanjani
- Kimberly Kicielinski
- Linda Liao
- Karin Murasko
- Ann Stroink
- Shelly Timmons
- Beverly Walters
- Stacey Wolfe
- Sarah Woodrow

Cerebrovascular

- Sepideh Amin-Hanjani
- Judy Huang
- Kimberly Kicielinski
- Stacey Wolfe
- Sharon Webb

Epilepsy

- Aviva Abosch
- Ellen Air
- Sharona Ben-Haim
- Alexandra Golby
- Kristen Riley
- Shenandoah Robinson

Pediatrics

- Holly Gilmer
- Cathy Mazzola
- Karin Murasko
- Lauren Schwartz
- Shenandoah Robinson

Pain/Functional

- Ellen Air
- Aviva Abosch
- Sharona Ben-Haim
- Darlene Lobel
- Julie Pilitsis
- Jennifer Sweet

Spine

- Aruna Ganju
- Alia Hdeib
- Michelle Johnson
- Cati Miller
- Laura Pare
- Ann Parr
- Tanya Quinn
- Karin Schwartz
- Eve Tsai
- Marjorie Wang
- Sarah Woodrow



WINS Speakers Bureau

Trauma

- Odette Harris
- Tanya Quinn
- Patti Raskin
- Shenandoah Robinson
- Uzma Samadani
- Martina Stippler
- Roxanne Todor
- Shelly Timmons
- Eve Tsai
- Jamie Ullman
- Sharon Webb
- Stacey Wolfe
- Sarah Woodrow

Tumor

- Deborah Benzil
- Veronica Chiang
- Isabelle Germano
- Roberta Glick
- Alexandra Golby
- Linda Liao Karin Murasko
- Susan Pannullo
- Gail Rosseau
- Eve Tsai
- Maryam Rahman

