

Breaking barriers for young women

“I stand
on the sacrifices
of a million women before me
thinking
what can I do
to make this mountain taller
so the women after me
can see farther”
Legacy – Rupi Kaur

The gender gap in Cardiology is eye-catching. Females make less than 15% of practicing cardiologists and a much smaller percentage of interventional cardiologists or electrophysiologists. The decision to pursue a career in Cardiology can be daunting, especially for a female high school student. The reasons behind this are various. First of all, at this young age many students are uncertain how to achieve their career goals or which paths should they take, especially without a prior exposure to the field. Secondly, female role models are needed, but due to the fact that they are severely underrepresented in Cardiology, they are not easily available. Although strength means the will to persevere, irrespective of the barriers encountered, career advancement is not always exclusively up to us.

I was introduced to this issue by one of my tremendous mentors, Dr. Mahi Ashwath, the President of the Iowa chapter of the ACC, who is devoted to uplifting the next generation of cardiologists. Higher exposure of women in cardiology is pivotal in expanding female role models. To that end, several events were planned by the American College of Cardiology (ACC) Women in Cardiology (WIC) to nurture an interest in young women to consider Cardiology as a career.

Iowa ACCWIC

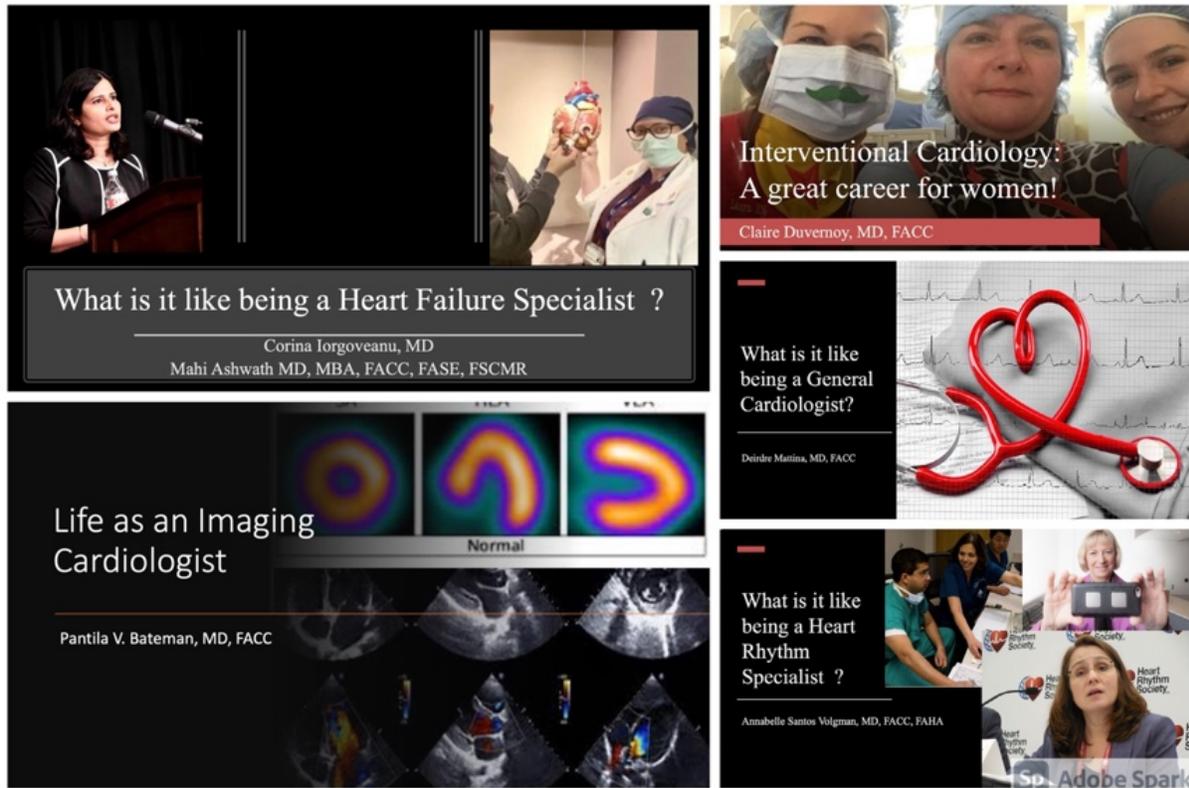
In order to help these students, Iowa ACC WIC Chapter organized an event entirely dedicated for these young, bright high-school students. This event held in the evening of February 15th 2021, brought together inquisitive girls from Iowa-area high schools and female cardiology fellows, nurse practitioners and physicians. It was a valuable and interactive hour spent talking about the pathways that led us to medicine, the joys of being a WIC, how to find role models, work-life balance, etc.



#SheLooksLikeACardiologist event

On a bigger scale, a larger Cardiology group, led by Dr. Deirdre Mattina, as part of the Midwest WIC Alliance, supported by a grant from the ACC, have united to provide visible role models, mentorship and to promote women within our specialty. This event took place on February 27th 2021 and was also designed to inspire female high-school students from the Midwest and beyond, with an interest in medicine to consider the thrilling field of Cardiology. We took a deep dive into life as a female Cardiologist and provided advice on how to achieve academic success.

It was kicked off by **Dr Deirdre Mattina**, the keynote speaker, who discussed diversity and inclusion in medicine and particularly in cardiovascular training. This was followed by highlights of different sub-specialties within Cardiology including General Cardiology, Cardiac Imaging, Interventional Cardiology, Electrophysiology, and Advanced Heart Failure, led by female cardiologists from Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin.



Dr. **Laxmi Mehta**, a non-invasive and preventative cardiologist at the Ohio State University, started the discussion by what sparked her interest in Cardiology to begin with and how a general cardiologist can make a difference in people's lives. She gave valuable advice to young girls on what pathways are available for them in order to pursue a medical career. Dr. Mehta reinforced how diverse the field is and how cardiology has something for everyone.



Drs. Dierdre Mattina, Laxmi Mehta, Mahi Ashwath and Renuka Jain

This was followed by “Imaging in Cardiology” session, where cardiology fellows from University of Iowa (**Drs. Iorgoveanu, Khan, Nagarajan**) along with **Dr. Mahi Ashwath** discussed cardiac imaging options (TTE, stress testing, cardiac CT, cardiac MRI) and their importance in the diagnosis, follow up and in providing prognostic information. They took us on a tour where the action takes place and described each imaging modality and shared why they love imaging along with giving their perspective about being a women in cardiology. **Dr. Padaria** shared with us her story on how she joined this field and what her favorite aspects are.

A session on advanced structural heart imaging and interventional echocardiography was led by **Dr. Renuka Jain** from Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center in Wisconsin where she took high-school students by taking them on a trip to the cath lab and described different aspects of her work. **Dr. Marcie Berger** provided valuable insight on atrial fibrillation and treatment options in the EP lab.

Dr. Patrycja Galazka encouraged the students to invest in themselves, and encouraged them to consider this field, given a vast array of possibilities and options within the field. **Dr. Claire Duvernoy**, an interventional cardiologist from University of Michigan shared with us her passion for this field and what a huge difference interventional cardiology can make in cardiac patients, in both acute and non-acute settings. **Drs. Sutton, Gualano, Kawamoto, Hughes, Yellavarthy** joined her in highlighting how everything is possible if there is enough will and perseverance, and how crucial finding good mentors can be.

Dr. Dina Sparano, an electrophysiologist from the Cleveland Clinic, shared her passion for what she does. Although interventional electrophysiology remains one of the fields that have a small percentage (9%) of women, Dr Sparano sees this not only as a challenge, but also as a gift. Women in this field are a growing group; and they have started to embrace the power of collaboration and staying in touch with each other, this way becoming a powerful group of women. The Heart Rhythm Society is dedicated to increasing diversity and inclusion and has had several female Presidents recently.



Drs Bateman, Jarori, Rao, Guglin, Walsh and Morris from University of Indiana were the last to present a thoughtful discussion on heart failure and the advances within the field, from mechanical support devices to heart transplant.

This event ended with very energetic and interactive live Q&A session with the high-school students. We were thrilled that we had over 400 registered and 200 female high school students attend this event and their feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

The event was a great opportunity not only to connect with mentors, but also to have a glimpse of how real life within these sub-specialties really is. As the initial quote by Rupri Kaur beautifully emphasized, “we must never forget that we stand on the sacrifices of those who have paved an avenue for us, and we should continue paying it forward.”

We believe that through increased exposure to the field of Cardiology and mentorship we will inspire more girls to pursue Cardiology in the years to come and create a pipeline to this amazing medical field for bright, young women. I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Mahi Ashwath was encouraging and supporting me in this process, and all the other WIC leaders who are such a great inspiration for me and everyone who joined.



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